

Homes England commissions MMC research study to drive construction innovation

- As part of the agency's strategic objective to improve construction productivity and encourage the uptake of MMC in housing delivery, a series of Homes England's own sites will participate in the study.
- Monitoring the construction of around 1,500 homes at sites across country over several years, the study will test the performance of different types of MMC.
- The research will explore a range of themes and seek to learn lessons about how MMC technologies might be improved upon in future.

Homes England has commissioned its own research study into modern methods of construction (MMC) to drive innovation in the construction industry.

As part of the government housing agency's strategic objective to improve construction productivity and encourage the uptake of MMC in housing delivery, a series of Homes England's own sites will participate in the study, delivering ambitious levels of MMC which are higher than the market norm.

Monitoring the construction of around 1,500 homes at sites across country over several years, the study will test the performance of different types of MMC to provide long-term, in-depth and verifiable data so that informed decisions about emerging construction technologies can be made.

Sites confirmed as being part of the study so far include:

Northstowe Phase 2a, a 406-home 100% MMC neighbourhood in Cambridgeshire being brought forward by House by Urban Splash; the partnership between Urban Splash, Sekisui House and Homes England. The modular homes will be manufactured in the House factory in Alfreton, East Midlands.

Spencer's Park in Hemel Hempstead, a 600-home development by Countryside, where all the homes will be closed panel timber frame units.

The 87-home York Road development being delivered by Vistry Partnerships in Birmingham. The homes will be built using a timber frame closed panel system, delivered to site for assembly.

The study will also monitor sites in Swindon, Warrington, Newcastle and Milton Keynes, with details to be announced in the coming months.

Covering a range of offsite and modular building techniques, modern methods of construction have the potential to be significantly more productive than traditional building methods; allowing homes to be built more quickly, addressing labour and skills shortages and improving the quality, consistency and energy efficiency of newly built homes.

The research will explore a range of themes, including cost and pace of build compared to traditional building methods, skills required, safety performance, snagging and defect issues, construction wastage, energy efficiency performance and post-occupation performance. The study will also seek to learn lessons about how these technologies might be improved upon in future and give confidence to the industry to encourage more widespread use of MMC technologies.

Atkins and Faithful+Gould have been appointed as the agency's research and development partner for the project. Working with the Building Research Establishment and University College London, they will collect and monitor data from the developers and produce annual updates on the research findings, before a final report is published at the end of the build programme.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

"Building the homes the country needs is a priority for the Government and modern methods of construction have enormous potential to not only accelerate this work but to deliver better quality homes too.

"I am delighted that this research will bring together some of the most promising housebuilding innovations around today. Such an extensive and practical study will no doubt inform housebuilding for years to come."

Nick Walkley, Chief Executive of Homes England, said:

"If we are to deliver homes at the scale, pace and quality the country needs, we have to seriously shake up how we build homes in England. This is at the very heart of our mission and it means embracing new technologies like modern methods of construction.

"Despite the impact of coronavirus being felt across the housebuilding sector, Homes England is open for business. We can be certain that the demand for high-quality homes will remain and concerns about labour supply or quality will not go away.

"Now more than ever, we recognise that more needs to be done to share learning and build confidence in MMC. This large-scale, long-term and in-depth research project will provide the sector with the critical evidence it needs to make informed decisions about MMC and deliver better homes faster."

Jon Swan, Client Director for Homes England, Atkins, said:

"With UK-wide expertise in the housing sector, we have an appetite for doing things differently. Relying on a solutions-based approach, our team will gather comparable and verifiable data to evaluate how MMC could be used to solve the construction industry's flatlining productivity and other key challenges within the UK's residential sector.

"The first step will be to establish a benchmark approach to measuring the impact of MMC. This consistency in analysis across the industry will lead to an ever-growing data set on MMC, with the potential to inform and improve the housing industry for years to come."

Andrew Prickett, Head of Residential, Faithful+Gould, said:

“The UK is currently tasked with the target of delivering 300,000 new homes every year. Through this landmark initiative, we will collect and analyse a substantial body of data to quantify the performance of modern methods of construction and bring clarity to the housing industry on the benefits of choosing this technology. Working closely with Homes England, this is a great opportunity to explore house building best practice and find ways to make housing safer, more affordable and more efficient to build.”

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About Homes England

[Homes England](#) is the Government’s housing accelerator. We have the appetite, influence, expertise and resources to drive positive market change. By releasing more land to developers who want to make a difference and investing in infrastructure, we are making possible the new homes the country needs.

We welcome partners who share our ambition to challenge the traditional norms and build better homes faster.

About Atkins

[Atkins](#) is one of the world’s most respected design, engineering and project management consultancies, employing over 18,300 people across the UK, North America, Middle East and Africa, Asia Pacific and Europe. We build long-term trusted partnerships to create a world where lives are enriched through the implementation of our ideas. You can view Atkins’ recent projects [here](#).

About Faithful+Gould

[Faithful+Gould](#) is a world leading integrated project and program management consultancy. Operating at the forefront of our industry for 70 years, our integrated approach delivers business improvements and efficiencies across every environment and every sector. Faithful+Gould is a member of the SNC-Lavalin Group.

About SNC-Lavalin

Founded in 1911, [SNC-Lavalin](#) is a fully integrated professional services and project management company with offices around the world. SNC-Lavalin connects people, technology and data to help shape and deliver world-leading concepts and projects, while offering comprehensive innovative solutions across the asset lifecycle. Our expertise is wide-ranging – consulting & advisory, intelligent networks & cybersecurity, design & engineering, procurement, project & construction management, operations & maintenance, decommissioning and sustaining capital – and delivered to clients in four strategic sectors: EDPM (engineering, design and project management), Infrastructure, Nuclear and Resources, supported by Capital. People. Drive. Results.

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UK to work with African Union to slow spread of coronavirus in Africa

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- £20 million to help African response to coronavirus
- Support to help train African health experts to tackle pandemic in Africa

The UK will invest up to £20 million in the African Union's new 'African Union Covid19 Response Fund' to tackle coronavirus and save lives.

This makes the UK the largest national donor to the fund, which was announced by Cyril Ramaphosa, Chairperson of the African Union (AU) and President of the Republic of South Africa last month. It will support African leaders and technical experts to slow the spread of coronavirus and save lives in Africa and worldwide.

The fund will tackle the pandemic by recruiting African health experts and deploying them where they are needed most, strengthening global tracking of the pandemic, combatting potentially harmful misinformation, providing specialist coronavirus training for health workers and making information about the virus more accessible to the public.

Announcing the funding today, International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

"As the UK faces its biggest peacetime challenge in tackling coronavirus, it's never been more important to work with our partners in Africa to fight disease.

“No one is safe until we are all safe and this new funding and support for African leadership will help protect us all – in the UK, Africa and around the world – from further spread of the virus.”

The announcement follows calls between Minister for Africa James Duddridge, AU Commissioner for Trade and Industry Albert Muchanga and AU Commissioner for Social Affairs Amira El-Fadil in which they discussed the risks Africa faces from the pandemic and how the UK is working with partners on the continent to tackle these shared global issues.

This new support for the African Union comes after the UK has already pledged over \$900 million to the international fight against coronavirus. The UK is also using its existing aid programmes to help vulnerable countries in Africa to strengthen their health systems. It also comes ahead of the UK hosting the virtual Global Vaccine Summit on 4th June, to secure future funding for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which has already saved the lives of millions of children in Africa from infectious diseases

Many countries on the continent are beginning to see exponential increases in coronavirus case numbers, presenting a severe risk to fragile healthcare systems. The high prevalence of HIV, malnutrition and other illnesses in parts of Africa may also worsen the impact of the virus. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are on average just 2 doctors for every 10,000 people, compared to 28 per 10,000 in the UK.

If healthcare systems become overwhelmed, the worldwide spread of the virus will be difficult to slow, risking new waves of infection. The UK's contribution to the Covid19 Response Fund will prevent this by working in partnership with the AU to help fight the virus, strengthen healthcare systems and save lives in the AU's 55 member states.

Today's announcement brings the total UK aid contribution to fighting coronavirus to up to £764 million (\$935.6 million). This money is helping to find a vaccine, providing vital humanitarian relief, feeding the world's poorest people, strengthening global healthcare systems and managing the risk of a global economic downturn.

Notes to editors

- The contribution to the AU African Union Covid19 Response Fund will support the implementation of the AU's continental strategy to: (1) coordinate the efforts of AU member states and multilateral and international partners in responding to the outbreak in Africa; and (2) promote an evidence-based approach for surveillance, diagnosis, treatment and control of coronavirus in Africa.
- Aspects of the strategy supported by the fund will include: the recruitment and deployment of African experts, through Africa CDC's African Voluntary Health Corps (a roster of 800 skilled volunteers), tracking the outbreak through effective screening, contact tracing and information management; combatting misinformation; creating an online community of practice with weekly webinars for African clinicians; publishing technical guidelines in all AU languages; creating an Africa

Taskforce for coronavirus to co-ordinate response activity, and convening AU member states to agree a continental response.

- The UN Economic Commission for Africa has warned that over 300,000 Africans could lose their lives due to coronavirus.

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster statement: 20 May 2020

With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the government's approach to implementing the Northern Ireland Protocol as part of the Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union.

The Protocol exists to ensure that the progress that the people of Northern Ireland have made in the 22 years since the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement is secured into the future.

The Belfast Agreement is built on the principle of consent. It was ratified by referenda in both Northern Ireland and Ireland. And the Agreement is crystal clear that any change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom can only come if the majority in Northern Ireland consent to any change.

The vital importance of consent is recognised in the provision for any alignment in the Protocol to be disapplied if Northern Ireland's political representatives conclude that it is no longer desirable. Embedding that recognition of consent in the Protocol was intrinsic to its acceptance by the government.

Therefore, for the Protocol to work it must respect the needs of all Northern Ireland's people, respect the fact that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the customs territory of the UK and respect the need to bear as lightly as possible on the everyday life of Northern Ireland.

Although there will be some new administrative requirements in the Protocol, these electronic processes will be streamlined and simplified to the maximum extent.

As the European Commission's own negotiator Michel Barnier has spelled out, the Protocol's procedures must be "as easy as possible, and not too burdensome, in particular for smaller businesses". As so often, but not always, M. Barnier is right. The economy of Northern Ireland is heavily dependent on small and medium-sized enterprises. Subjecting traders to unnecessary and disproportionate burdens, particularly as we wrestle with the economic consequences of COVID-19, would not serve the interests of the people of Northern Ireland for whom the Protocol was designed.

And the Protocol text itself is explicit that implementation “should impact as little as possible on the everyday life of communities”.

So in that context it is important for us all to recall that the clear majority of Northern Ireland’s trade is with the rest of the United Kingdom. So safeguarding the free flow of goods within the United Kingdom’s internal market is of critical importance to Northern Ireland’s economy and people.

Today we are publishing [a Command Paper that outlines how the Protocol can be implemented](#) in a way that would protect the interests of the people and economy of Northern Ireland, ensure the effective working of the UK’s internal market, and also provide appropriate protection for the EU Single Market, as well as uphold the rights of all Northern Ireland’s citizens. Now delivering on these proposals will require close working with the Northern Ireland Executive – underscoring once again the significance of the restoration of the Stormont institutions in January. I would like to put on record my gratitude for the constructive approach which has been shown by the Northern Ireland politicians, including the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, as well as Honourable Members from across the parties this House.

There are four steps we will take to ensure the Protocol is implemented effectively.

First, we will deliver unfettered access for NI producers to the whole of the UK market. Northern Ireland to Great Britain goods movements should take place as they do now. There should not be export declarations or any other processes as goods leave NI for GB, and we will deliver on unfettered access through legislation by the end of this year.

Second, we will ensure there are no tariffs on goods remaining within the UK customs territory.

In order to ensure that internal UK trade qualifies for tariff-free status, there will need to be declarations on goods as they move from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. But these systems will be electronic and administered by UK authorities. It will be for our authorities to determine any processes that are required – using the latest technology, risk and compliance techniques to keep these to an absolute minimum.

And that will also allow us to deliver on our third key proposal: which is that implementation of the Protocol will not involve new customs infrastructure.

We acknowledge, however, as we always have done, that on agrifood and live animal movements it makes sense to protect supply chains and the disease-free status of the island of Ireland – as has been the case since the 19th century.

That will mean some expansion of existing infrastructure to provide for some additional new processes for the agriculture and food sector. But these processes will build on what already happens at ports like Larne and Belfast. And we will work with the EU to keep these checks to a minimum, reflecting

the high standards we see right across the UK.

There is no such case however, for new customs infrastructure, and as such there will not be any.

Fourth, we will guarantee that Northern Ireland businesses will benefit from the lower tariffs that we deliver through our new Free Trade Agreements with third countries. This ensures that Northern Ireland businesses will be able to enjoy the full benefits of the unique access that they have to the UK and EU markets.

These four commitments will ensure that, as we implement the Protocol, that we give full effect to the requirements in its text to recognise Northern Ireland's place in the UK and its customs territory. And as we take the work of implementation forward, we will continue to work closely with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with Northern Ireland MPs from across the parties, and also the business, community and farming groups that have provided such valuable feedback for our approach.

We have already guaranteed, in the New Decade, New Approach deal, that the Northern Ireland Executive has a seat at the table in any meeting where Northern Ireland is being discussed and the Irish Government is present.

Alongside that will be a new business engagement forum that will exchange proposals, concerns and feedback from across the community on how best to maximise the free flow of trade. And we will ensure that those discussions sit at the heart of our thinking.

Mr Speaker, we recognise that there will be a wide range of voices and responses to our Command Paper. We will listen to these respectfully while we continue to put our own case with conviction at the Joint Committee.

Our approach will of course continue to be informed by our extensive engagement with businesses, politicians and individuals right across communities in Northern Ireland.

We stand ready to work with the EU in a spirit of collaboration and cooperation, so that a positive new chapter can open for Northern Ireland and its people in every community – and in that spirit that I commend this statement to the House.

[Assay Offices re-open](#)

News story

All 4 offices have now reopened and are providing assay services.



Following the temporary closures due to COVID-19, all 4 UK Assay Offices have now reopened to provide assay services.

Opening hours and arrangements are being managed carefully in line with government advice to ensure the welfare of staff and the public.

Please check the website for the relevant Assay Office for details of opening hours and arrangements:

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[First meeting of the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights](#)

News story

Joint Statement following the meeting of the Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights between the UK Government and European Commission via videoconference.



The first meeting of the UK-EU Specialised Committee on Citizens' Rights was held today, co-chaired by officials from the UK Government and European

Commission. The Committee was established by the Withdrawal Agreement to monitor the implementation and application of the Citizens' Rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement for EU citizens in the UK and UK nationals in the EU.

The UK and EU exchanged updates on the implementation of the citizens' rights provisions in the Withdrawal Agreement. We share the objective of ensuring the timely and correct implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement to provide certainty to UK nationals in the EU and EU citizens in the UK.

The UK and the EU reaffirmed their commitment to complying with the legal obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement that protect citizens' rights.

The co-chairs agreed that the Committee will meet regularly to follow the progress of implementation.

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