

Number of new homes built soars to an 11 year high

New data has found the number of new homes completed by developers in the year ending June 2019 had surged to over 170,000 – the highest number built over the same period in the last 11 years.

Published today (3 October 2019) by government, the figures show a total of 173,660 new homes were built for the year ending June 2019 – representing an 8% increase compared with the previous year alone.

Welcoming the figures, Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

As Housing Secretary, it's my mission to get Britain building.

The data released today is hugely welcome, with the number of new homes built reaching an 11-year high. We are moving in the right direction, but there is still much more to do if we are going to deliver the numbers needed by communities up and down the country.

I'm determined to deliver homes that are high-quality, well designed and good for the planet. Faster and simpler planning regulations will help us reach that goal, which is why I have announced measures to accelerate planning decisions for homes and reduce the use of unnecessary conditions by up to a third, freeing up developers so they can get on and build in a locally appropriate way.

The last year also saw the proportion of family houses built increase to 78% of all the new dwellings delivered in the marketplace – the highest the figure has been since 2000.

Ministers have this week announced new measures as part of the accelerated planning green paper which will quicken the pace of decision making and get shovels in the ground faster.

New permitted development rights, including allowing the demolition and rebuild of old commercial buildings, as well as requiring councils to meet timescales or refund planning application fees are aimed at getting homes built faster.

Today's data release points to positive news ahead of publication of comprehensive housing delivery statistics in November. Last year 220,000 new homes were delivered by the English housing market – the highest in all but one of the last 31 years.

The quarterly housebuilding figures give an indication that there will be an increase in housing supply for 2018 to 2019. The net additional dwellings

statistics will be published on the 14 November 2019.

The [House building: new build dwellings statistics](#) have been published today.

The accelerated planning green paper will be published in November 2019. [See more details](#).

[New support for foster families to overcome trauma](#)

Foster families will benefit from projects offering short breaks, mentoring, emergency sleepovers and social activities with other families to help create stability as they adjust to their new lives together.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has today (Thursday 3 October) launched fostering projects in 10 new locations, helping hundreds more foster families with practical and emotional support and advice, helping them tackle the day-to-day challenges of taking in a vulnerable young person from care and create a stable environment for them to live in.

The 'Mockingbird Family Model', delivered by The Fostering Network, brings foster families together in groups, centred around one experienced foster carer who lives nearby to act as a mentor. This builds a network on which they can rely in difficult moments, in the same way that families who are together from birth often rely on the support of extended family, friends or neighbours, and helping them cope with challenging behaviour or problems caused by trauma before they escalate.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Foster parents give stability to children who have often experienced nothing but trauma and chaos at home, giving them opportunities that most of us take for granted. The unique circumstances they face in becoming a new family means they need daily support from people who understand the challenges, offering them much-needed advice and respite when they feel isolated or alone.

Expanding the Mockingbird Family Model into new areas builds on a programme we know has real value to foster families, helping them to form vital communities so that parents can rely on one another through tough times and vulnerable children get the safe, supportive home life they deserve.

The expansion to 10 new areas, part of the Department for Education's

Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme, acts to keep families together safely and provides a community environment that understands and shares their experiences. It comes as findings from the Mockingbird programme show that foster families assisted through the programme built stronger relationships and became more resilient.

Alongside this additional help for foster families, the Department for Education has also today launched new projects in 18 council areas to support vulnerable children coping with chaotic home lives as a result of their parents' problems with mental health, domestic violence or addiction. Announced in April and backed by £84 million secured in last year's Autumn Budget, these projects reaffirm the core principle of the Children Act 1989 that where possible, children are best brought up with their parents.

Kevin Williams, Chief Executive at The Fostering Network, said:

We're delighted that the government is showing confidence in the Mockingbird programme and the difference it is making in the lives of fostered children and young people, as well as the foster families caring for them. This extra funding will allow us to bring the benefits of Mockingbird's extended family model to many more foster families across England and to get further insight into the impact of the programme.

The expansion of Mockingbird Family Model builds on investment worth nearly £500,000 in seven regions to explore new approaches to fostering, helping local authorities understand and meet the needs of children in their area. The funding will help with recruitment and support in the seven fostering partnerships, making sure they are enough foster families, in the right place and at the right time, to offer children the best possible home to meet their needs.

Michael Sanders, Executive Director of What Works for Children's Social Care, said:

I'm really excited to be part of this project, which will see a large expansion of the Mockingbird model to 10 new areas, while continuing to build on an already promising evidence base that will help local authorities and young people into the future.

Mockingbird will be expanded into Sheffield, East Cheshire, Wakefield, Warrington, South Tyneside, Barnsley, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Stoke-on-Trent.

Sniffer dogs at the border join fight against African swine fever

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner and the UK Chief Vet today (Thursday 3 October) visited Heathrow Airport to find out more about the work of Border Force and their highly-trained sniffer dogs to ensure the UK remains free of the animal disease African Swine Fever (ASF).

UK border officials enforce controls at the border on illegal meat by using sniffer dogs and searching freight, passengers and luggage. They will seize and destroy illegally imported meat products. This is because the disease is highly contagious and the virus can survive in pork meat products, even if cooked or frozen.

The operation was focused on passenger arrivals directly from South East Asian countries where African Swine Fever is prevalent.

Biosecurity Minister Lord Gardiner said:

It is essential that we keep African swine fever out of the UK and I would like to thank Border Force colleagues for taking the time this morning to show us all they do to prevent infected pork meat products arriving on our shores.

While there has never been an outbreak of African Swine Fever in the UK, we are not complacent and already have robust measures in place to protect against animal disease outbreaks.

The disease, which poses no threat to human health but is fatal for pigs, has already spread widely across Asia – including China and Vietnam – and parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Cases have also been reported throughout Sub Saharan Africa.

ASF has led to the deaths of over 800,000 pigs and wild boar in Europe and an estimated four million pigs in Asia, causing global pork prices to rise. If the disease was found in this country, it could have a devastating impact on the UK's commercial pig stock of five million pigs, as well as the trade of our pork products.

UK Chief Veterinary Officer Christine Middlemiss said:

This morning I witnessed first-hand Border Force's great work to ensure the UK remains ASF-free. However, we all have a role to play and it is crucial that anyone travelling from affected regions doesn't bring pork meat products into the UK.

In July, Defra launched a new campaign, working closely with the Devolved Administrations, at the UK's border to help keep the damaging animal disease out of the country. We have also written to universities to ask them to contact international students about not bringing in meat products when they come to the UK to study.

The main ways that the disease can spread are:

- Tourists or travellers bringing contaminated pork products with them from infected areas. All travellers are strongly advised to avoid bringing any pork products – including preserved meats, ham or pork sandwiches – back to the UK. Bringing in potentially contaminated pork products from affected regions is an offence – it can result in prosecution and a large fine.
- Pig keepers and members of the public feeding catering waste, kitchen scraps or pork products to their animals. It is illegal to do so.
- Travellers returning from ASF-affected areas coming into contact with domestic pigs, commercial holdings or smallholdings. The disease can spread via contaminated clothing, footwear or equipment, as well as pork products.
- Contaminated vehicles and equipment being taken onto commercial pig premises or workers wearing contaminated clothing or boots when entering pig premises.

[UK calls for restraint amid continued protests in Baghdad](#)

Minister for the Middle East, Dr Andrew Murrison said:

I am deeply concerned about the situation in Baghdad. My condolences to the families of those who have died.

The right to peaceful protest must be respected: we are urging the Iraqi security forces to show restraint and to respond in a strictly proportionate manner.

The UK continues to support the Iraqi government to deliver on the legitimate demands of the protestors for jobs, services and tackling corruption.

Chevening presentations tour cities in Turkmenistan

Chevening scholarship presentations, which kicked off in Ashgabat on Monday 30 September, have now completed a short tour in the city of Mary after delivering a successful presentation to the students of the Dashoguz Institute of Agriculture on Tuesday, 1 October 2019.

In addition to finding out invaluable information about the UK government's flagship programme, young and talented students from remote cities took the opportunity to interact with the newly-arrived British Ambassador. Speaking at the Agriculture Institute in Dashoguz and Institute of Energy in Mary cities, Ambassador Philpott highlighted the importance of education and encouraged interested students to benefit from world class education opportunities in the UK.

Chevening in Dashoguz

A presentation dedicated to the visitors of the American Corner in Mary was another key element of the Embassy's combined trips to these cities. A number of Chevening presentations, delivered to Turkmen students by Rebekah Palmer, International Liaison Officer from the Chevening Secretariat, helped potential candidates to understand clearly what Chevening is about, its criteria and requirements.

Chevening in Dashoguz

Chevening in Dashoguz

Chevening applications are currently open until 5 November 2019. If you're undecided, and would like to find out more please join us at our next presentation at the American Embassy's Information and Resource Centre in Ashgabat on Thursday, 24 October 2019.

Chevening in Mary