

Press release: Appeal decisions could be cut by 5 months

- Government publish independent review into planning appeal inquiries
- Proposals could drive down the time taken to decide appeals from 47 to 26 weeks
- Ministers welcome the report and commit to working with the Planning Inspectorate to drive down the time it takes to process appeal inquiries

The most contentious planning cases could be decided up to 5 months faster, and some in half the time, giving certainty to communities about future developments, a major review has found.

Bridget Rosewell CBE said the average time to decide a planning appeal inquiry could be slashed from an average of 47 weeks to around 26 weeks.

As [Rosewell's report](#) was published today (12 February 2019), Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said speeding up decisions can help the government deliver on its target to build 300,000 homes each year by the mid-2020s.

Faster inquiries into contested development will give house builders and local communities more certainty on when decisions will be made, while also maintaining the integrity of the appeals system which works to prevent inappropriate development.

The wide-ranging review concluded outdated administrative processes and poor IT infrastructure were unnecessarily holding up cases.

Her report also suggested that a lack of suitably qualified inspectors was also hampering efforts to set up inquiry hearings on time.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP commenting on the review, said:

Planning appeal inquiries have held up development and kept communities waiting in limbo – 47 weeks on average is far too long to wait for a decision on something so important as a proposal for new development.

That's why I welcome Bridget's diligent work over the last 6 months, which has produced a fantastic report and provided us with a clear direction of travel on how we can ensure the appeals inquiry process is fit for purpose.

Reducing the time it takes to secure crucial decisions ensures the delivery of more homes, in the right places, and help us reach our ambition of 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Mrs Bridget Rosewell CBE added:

It's critical that all parts of the planning system contribute towards the efficient delivery of the homes we need as well as the refusal of those which don't meet our high standards.

My review found, with commitment for all involved, that speeding up inquiries can be achieved through straightforward reforms, shaving months off the current time it takes for inspectors to make a decision.

I'm pleased my report has been welcomed by the government and the Planning Inspectorate and look forward to seeing these changes being implemented.

The report made 22 recommendations. These range from committing the Planning Inspectorate to introducing a new online portal for the submission of inquiry appeals to setting out a strategy for recruiting additional inspectors so inquiries can be scheduled sooner, reducing the length of time they take to conclude.

The Planning Inspectorate will prepare an implementation plan which will set out precisely how it will deliver these recommendations.

The [Rosewell Review](#) is part of the government's programme of reforms and targeted investment to ensure the planning system delivers 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s.

The government will now consider the findings before publishing a response in the coming months.

The review was undertaken by Mrs Rosewell over a period of 6 months and was submitted to the government on time in December 2018.

Approximately 30,000 new homes were granted permission by the Planning Inspectorate through the appeals process last year.

Mrs Rosewell, a qualified economist, has extensive knowledge and experience in the planning sector, including previously acting as an expert witness at planning inquiries. Among her current roles, Mrs Rosewell is a Commissioner for the National Infrastructure Commission and Chair of Atom Bank.

The [Planning Inspectorate](#) is an agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and handles over 20,000 appeals each year. Planning Inspectors appointed by the Secretary of State are independent and impartial.

Speech: British High Commissioner raises royal toast to celebrate Burns Night in Fiji

Good evening.

Burns night is an event held every year to commemorate one of Scotland's finest poet of all times. Born in January 25, 1759 to parents William Burns and Agnes Brown, Robert Burns developed an early passion to read traditional stories and songs . From a young age, he nurtured a passion for poetry. Not having the time at all to sit and ponder on his poems was he was constantly helping his parents work at the farm, it became his habit to compose his poems and songs as he worked.

Robert Burns lived to the age of 37 and during that time, travelled wide and far composing poems and songs. As well as making original compositions, Burns also collected folk songs from across Scotland, often revising or adapting them.

So how did Burns Night start? Burns Night started shortly after the poet's death when his friends celebrated his life and career in Ayrshire, Scotland, in the late 1700s on the date of his death, July 21.

The date was later changed to the day of his birth, and now those in Scotland, and some areas within the UK and parts of the world and here in Fiji, also mark Burns Night.

On the 25th of January each year, there is not an hour in the day or night when a Burns Supper is not taking place somewhere on this earth. On this day people don their tartan, rustle up a tasty plate of haggis and recite some rhymes in honour of Scotland's favourite son but Burn's night is more than just a good reason to raise a 'wee dram' of whisky while enthusiastically belting 'Auld Lang Syne'.

A lot has been written about this man over the years, a man who has been often described as a sort of 18th century rock star whose amazing riffs in poetry, public performance ended prematurely when he died at the age of 37.

Tonight, we celebrate the birth and life of a common man whose work left a huge impact on the world. At 21 years old, Robert was elected as the President of the Tarbolton Bachelors Club in 1780, thus setting an example followed by many Burns clubs around the world.

Robert tried a few ventures which did not work and he died on the 21st of July, 1796 after being sick. He was buried with full Military Honours on the 25th of July.

Robert is quite known to have been a humourist, storyteller, satirist, a lover, socialist, nationalist and a philosopher. To those who knew him, he

was romantic, charming, funny and sarcastic with a devastating wit.

I will therefore highlight a few things about Robert Burns that are generally not known about him:

- Widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland, after Queen Victoria and Christopher Columbus, Robbie Burns has more statues dedicated to him around the world than any other non-religious figure;
- 260 years after his birth, Robert Burns is still beloved and has inspired modern recreations of his work such as J.D. Salinger's 1951 novel 'Catcher in the Rye' believed to be based on the poem 'Comin Thro the Rye' and John Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' is believed to stem from his poem 'To a mouse';
- British born astronaut, Nicholas Patrick carried a miniature book of Burns poems into orbit on a two-week space mission in 2010. Burns' poetry completed 217 orbits of Earth.
- Robert Burns was the first face to feature on a commemorative bottle of Coca Cola in 2009.
- The largest collection of Burns' work can be found in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow which includes translations of his poems in more than 30 languages.
- 'Auld Lang Syne' traditionally sung at the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve is one of Burn's most famous pieces of work and is recognised by Guinness Book of World Records as one of the three most popular songs in the English language.

Chieftain, thank you again for your invitation of having me here in this special night.

I am very proud to give you this toast which we should drink with pride and joy.

I hereby ask you all to fill your glasses and raise them high as I give you the Immortal memory of Robert Burns.

Speech: Speech: Melanie Hopkins welcomes back 2017/2018 Fijian Chevening scholars

Bula vinaka Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a pleasure to have you all here today despite your busy schedules.

This year, we are celebrating Chevening's 35th Anniversary which was launched 11th October, 2017.

Like every year, we take time to catch up with the Chevening alumni and this enables scholars to also build their network.

Applications for Chevening scholarships will open again in August and we encourage you to look out for potential leaders who can excel academically and benefit from studying in the UK.

British Universities as you all know, are profoundly international, reflecting our belief that knowledge knows no boundaries and that diversity has inherent educational value. The program has a global alumni network of more than 50,000 exceptional individuals who are breaking boundaries across a variety of professional fields.

In the 35 years, Chevening has remained constant; to bring the brightest individuals from across the world to the UK to experience all that the UK has to offer. These individuals immerse themselves in our culture and learn at world class universities and institution, making life-long friendships with their peers in the UK.

Today, we celebrate your achievements and we are here to let you know how proud we are.

I will be presenting certificates to Doctor Lusiana Manoa, who has been recognised and awarded a joint award for the Brian Abel-Smith prize for outstanding overall performance in the MSc in International Health Policy and to Dr Mike Kama who studied MSc in Control of Infectious Diseases.

I would like to wish you all the very best in your areas of expertise.

Thank you.

[News story: Upskirting: know your rights](#)

What is upskirting?

Upskirting is a highly intrusive practice, which typically involves someone taking a picture under another person's clothing without their knowledge, with the intention of viewing their genitals or buttocks (with or without underwear).

It can take place in a range of places, eg British Transport Police have seen a rise of reports on public transport.

The new law will capture instances where the purpose of the behaviour is to obtain sexual gratification, or to cause humiliation, distress or alarm.

Anyone, and any gender, can be a victim and this behaviour is completely unacceptable.

What effect can upskirting have on victims?

Upskirting is distressing and a humiliating violation of privacy for victims.

We want victims to know and be confident that reports to the police will be taken seriously.

[Gina Martin's story on 'upskirting'](#)

What punishment can upskirting perpetrators face under the new law?

Perpetrators will face two years in prison. By criminalising this distressing practice, it is hoped that it deters people from committing the crime.

Upskirting, where committed to obtain sexual gratification, can result in the most serious offenders being placed on the sex offenders register.

The new law will send a clear message that such behaviour is criminal and will not be tolerated.

What can victims of upskirting do?

If you're a victim of upskirting, the police and other organisations are there to help you.

Please don't suffer in silence, [seek support](#). You may want to speak to someone you already know and trust, or get in touch with a charity.

It's important to [know your rights](#) after a crime has taken place, the police will be able to talk you through this.

Victims of upskirting will be entitled to automatic protection, eg from being identified in the media (so they won't be able to publish any identifying details such as names, addresses or photos).

['Upskirting' – why the law had to change](#)

Why is the law changing?

Upskirting has not gone unpunished in England and Wales – depending on the circumstances it is already prosecuted under the common law offence of outraging public decency.

However, following concerns expressed by victims, a review of the law found that the existing criminal law may not have been able to capture all instances.

The Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill, which is commonly known as the Upskirting Bill, was introduced on 21st June 2018. It will receive Royal Assent soon.

[Press release: PM meeting with the Prime Minister of Malta: 11 February 2019](#)

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

This afternoon, the Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of Malta Joseph Muscat for bilateral talks at Downing Street.

Opening the meeting, the Prime Minister thanked Prime Minister Muscat for the assurances on residency and rights that he has given to UK nationals living in Malta in the event of no deal.

The Prime Minister then updated Prime Minister Muscat on Brexit, including recent developments in Parliament and the legally-binding changes we are seeking on the backstop to enable Parliament to vote in support of the deal.

The Prime Minister then discussed her meetings last week with President Tusk, President Juncker and Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, and the ongoing ministerial engagement on alternative arrangements to the backstop.

The leaders agreed that it is in everyone's interests for the UK to leave

with a deal, and the Prime Minister reiterated her commitment to work as quickly as possible to find a solution and provide certainty for businesses and international partners.

Finally, Prime Minister Muscat thanked the Prime Minister for the UK's assistance in tackling money-laundering in Malta, and the leaders agreed to continue working together on this shared priority.