

Press release: Government's vision for a greener future launched

A pledge to eliminate avoidable waste, introduce new safeguards for wildlife and connect more children with nature are among the ambitious plans for a greener future outlined by Prime Minister Theresa May and Environment Secretary Michael Gove today.

In a major speech today, the Prime Minister has launched the government's landmark 25 Year Environment Plan, setting out how we will improve the environment over a generation by creating richer habitats for wildlife, improving air and water quality and curbing the scourge of plastic in the world's oceans.

["A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment"](#) sets out how over the next quarter of a century the government will:

- Crackdown on plastics by eliminating all avoidable plastic waste through extending the 5p plastic bag charge to small retailers, removing consumer single use plastics from the government estate, supporting the water industry to significantly increase water fountains and working with retailers on introducing plastic-free supermarket aisles.
- Help wildlife thrive by creating 500,000 hectares of new habitat for endangered species, supporting farmers to turn fields into meadows and other habitats, replenishing depleted soils and providing £5.7 million to kick-start a [new Northern Forest](#).
- Be a world leader in environmental protection by investigating the feasibility of an anti-poaching taskforce to tackle the illegal wildlife trade, committing overseas aid to help developing nations combat plastic waste, and extending the UK's network of marine protected areas
- Deliver a Green Brexit by consulting on a [new environmental watchdog](#) to hold government to account for environmental standards, and setting out a new approach to agriculture and fisheries management
- Seek to embed a 'net environmental gain' principle so development delivers environmental improvements locally and nationally, enabling housing development without increasing overall burdens on developers
- Connect people with nature by creating 'nature friendly schools' and reviewing National Parks to see how they can improve and whether the network should be extended.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Respecting nature's intrinsic value and making sure we are wise stewards of our natural world is critical if we are to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

Our Environment Plan sets out how over the next 25 years we will radically reduce the waste that is choking oceans and rivers, cleanse our air of toxic pollutants and create new habitats for our most precious wildlife to thrive.

Through this plan we will build on our reputation as a global leader in environmental protection, creating an environment everyone can enjoy and helping the next generation flourish.

In a world-first, the 25 Year Environment Plan also sets out how we will use a natural capital approach to help us see the additional benefits – whether that is improved health and wellbeing, or national prosperity – in every part of our environment, helping improve and direct decision making, and guiding new development.

The Plan sits alongside existing work. A [Call for Evidence](#) on reward and return schemes for drinks containers, including plastic bottles, has closed. Its findings are now being assessed by the Working Group, who will make recommendations to ministers this Spring.

As announced in the Budget, the Government will also launch a further Call for Evidence shortly on how changes to the tax system or charges on single-use plastics can play a role in reducing waste.

The plan sits alongside the Government's [Clean Growth Strategy](#), which sets out how the UK is leading the world in cutting carbon emissions to combat climate change and driving economic growth.

[News story: MHRA streamlines services for device customers](#)

At MHRA we are always working to improve the transparency, responsiveness, usability and effectiveness of our services.

To make our systems easier to use, we have developed and successfully piloted a new online service which:

- offers customers a better way to do business with us
- provides a single online account with the Agency

- provides access to Devices Registration (DR) and Certificates of Free Sale (CFS) services via a new online portal
- allows our staff to access and provide information to customers more quickly and in a more joined-up way
- enhances our customer service to you

What do I need to do?

Our new online accounts began being rolled out to customers at the end of November 2017 and we aim to have everyone on the new system by the end of February 2018.

If you use our Device Registration service or you apply for Certificates of Free Sale you will be moved to the new system in groups and will receive information with your instructions and go-live date.

There is no need to re-register. Your existing registration will remain valid and we will let you know what action you need to take to update your new account.

Further information

[Read more about our new system.](#)

If you have any further questions, please contact:
devices.transformation@mhra.gov.uk

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[News story: Over 350,000 people benefit from support to buy their own home](#)

[New statistics](#) show that over 350,000 people across the UK have now used the government's Help to Buy schemes to help them cross the threshold and buy their own home. First time buyers continue to flock towards the [Help to Buy: ISA](#), with more than 1.1 million now opened, offering government bonuses of up to £3,000 on top of their savings.

[Help to Buy statistics](#) released today (Thursday 11 January) show that:

- over 350,000 completions have taken place using one or more of the Help to Buy schemes
- over 300,000 first time buyer households are now on the housing ladder thanks to Help to Buy

- over 93% of completions across the Help to Buy schemes have taken place outside of London

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

This government is dedicated to helping current and future generations buy their own home. The government's Help to Buy schemes has helped make that dream a reality for more than 350,000 people so far, with the ISA currently being used by many more future buyers to save towards that goal. Help to Buy is part of our wider plan to tackle the housing challenge and ensure the next generation can get on and climb up the housing ladder.

Housing Minister, Dominic Raab, said:

This government is committed to helping more people get on the housing ladder, with the support of a range of low cost home ownership products.

Thanks to our Help to Buy: Equity Loan scheme the dream of home ownership continues to become a reality for thousands more households across the country.

More than 140,000 completions have now taken place through the [Help to Buy Equity Loan scheme](#), which offers buyers up to 20% of a newly built home's costs so they only need to provide a 5% deposit.

95% of first time buyers who pay stamp duty will also benefit from the [Stamp Duty changes announced in the Budget](#). The government has abolished stamp duty altogether for first-time buyer purchases up to £300,000, and made this relief available for the first £300,000 of properties worth up to £500,000, providing help for people in higher value areas.

The Chancellor also announced that an average of 300,000 homes built each year will be delivered by the mid-2020s through new financial support and planning reforms. Together, this government action means annual housing supply is on track to reach to its highest level since 1970 by the end of the Parliament.

The most completions using the Help to Buy: ISA have taken place in the North West, and Yorkshire and The Humber. In total, 106,612 completions have taken place across the UK using the ISA bonus since its launch in December 2015.

The London Help to Buy scheme provides an equity loan of up to 40% for buyers in the capital with a 5% deposit. It has helped 5,715 buyers in the capital across 33 boroughs purchase their own property between February 2016 and September 2017.

Press release: Report 01/2018: Runaway of a maintenance train near Markinch

PDF, 4.93MB, 27 pages

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Summary

At about 04:25 hrs on Tuesday 17 October 2017, a maintenance train that was clearing leaf debris from the track, hit a tree just north of Markinch station, Fife. The debris from the tree disabled the train's braking system. The train came to a stop before running away backwards for a distance of about 4.7 miles (7.5 km). The train crew on board made an emergency call to the signaller before jumping off the train, suffering minor injuries.

The train eventually came to a stop at Thornton North junction after running backwards and forwards between two adjacent gradients a total of nine times.

The brakes were fully released when debris from the tree operated the release mechanisms on the brake system distributors underneath both of the vehicles in the train.

The driver was unable to reapply the brakes because the debris from the tree had also separated all three of the brake pipes between the two vehicles in the train.

Recommendations

The RAIB has made two recommendations to Network Rail. The first addresses the risk of a runaway being initiated by debris on the track causing multiple disruptions to the braking system on this type of train. The second recommendation addresses the possibility that similar risks might be present for other short formation trains that operate on its infrastructure.

Notes to editors

1. The sole purpose of RAIB investigations is to prevent future accidents and incidents and improve railway safety. RAIB does not establish blame, liability or carry out prosecutions.
2. RAIB operates, as far as possible, in an open and transparent manner. While our investigations are completely independent of the railway industry, we do maintain close liaison with railway companies and if we

discover matters that may affect the safety of the railway, we make sure that information about them is circulated to the right people as soon as possible, and certainly long before publication of our final report.

3. For media enquiries, please call 01932 440015.

Newsdate: 11 January 2018

Press release: New housing agency to boost housebuilding

A new national housing agency – Homes England – has today (11 January 2018) been launched by Housing Secretary Sajid Javid as one of the key steps towards delivering the homes the country needs.

As the successor to the Homes and Communities Agency, Homes England will drive forward change, as set out in the government's [housing white paper](#).

By bringing together their existing planning expertise and new land buying powers, the new agency will play a major role in securing land in areas where people want to live, support smaller and more innovative house builders into the market and resource brownfield sites from across the country to deliver homes for families.

Homes England will play a major role in fixing the housing market by helping to deliver an average of 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Visiting Alconbury in Cambridgeshire, a former airfield which will bring 5,000 new homes, the Housing Secretary toured the 1,420 acre site which is just one of the many locations across the country receiving government funding to build more homes.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said:

This government is determined to build the homes our country needs and help more people get on the housing ladder. Homes England will be at the heart of leading this effort.

The development at Alconbury is a prime example of how the agency has worked to deliver thousands of new homes, as well as improve roads and create space for local businesses.

The new agency will be key in replicating this approach right across the country and will help us build a Britain fit for the future.

Nick Walkley, Chief Executive of Homes England, said:

As Homes England, we will use our land, finance and expertise to expand the delivery of affordable new homes and connect ambitious partners to remove barriers to house building.

Sir Ed Lister, Chairman of Homes England, added:

We will take the lead in delivering better quality homes and great places that set the bar high for others. We will also stimulate demand for Modern Methods of Construction and ultimately disrupt the housing market.

The launch of Homes England is just one of the steps this government is taking to fix the broken housing market. Since 2010, government has delivered more than 1.1 million homes and Help to Buy has supported over 255,000 people to buy a property.

Around 310 local authorities have now published a brownfield register, revealing over 26,000 hectares of developable land on over 16,000 sites. More registers expected to be published over the next few weeks. By prioritising both the areas where people want to live and developers can build, Homes England will use the registers to progress brownfield development across the country.

The agency has already been supporting developments across the country including 10,000 new homes on a brownfield site northwest of Cambridge and a 3,200 new homes site in South Yorkshire.

Homes England will develop a new commercial approach to acquiring, preparing, managing and developing land in areas of high demand and strategic importance. By focusing on using both the land and money to support builders of all sizes to increase supply will continue to support accelerated construction on a selection of sites.

Meeting housing demand is also about supporting the SME sector and over £750 million of the £1 billion short term fund has been committed to SMEs, custom builders and developers using modern methods of construction which will result in over 25,500 homes being built. Homes England will support this initiative and SME builders to grow their businesses and build more homes.

The Homes and Communities Agency was established in 2008 as the government's housing, land and regeneration agency, and the regulator of social housing providers in England.

The Chancellor announced that the Homes and Communities Agency will be launched as Homes England during the [Autumn Budget in 2017](#).

Homes England is lending £45.07 million to Urban&Civic through the [Home](#)

[Building Fund](#) to ramp up the delivery of 4,507 homes by funding enabling works and infrastructure. The loan will be repaid over 11 years as serviced land is sold to house builders.

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The £1 billion short term fund is part of the Home Building Fund which also consists of a £2 billion long term fund for infrastructure. A further £1.5 billion was announced in the Autumn Budget for the short term fund.

Government has previously announced that the Regulator of Social Housing will be separated from the Agency and established as a standalone organisation. Homes England will be a commercially-focused land and investment agency.

See further details about the new [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#).