

Fast track for public services: new planning reforms to speed up delivery of schools and hospitals

- New schools and hospitals to be delivered quicker through a faster, simpler planning process
- New, simpler process for business premises to become new homes to boost town centres through brownfield development
- The measures build on last week's Spending Review, confirming nearly £20 billion of investment in new housing and a £4 billion Levelling Up Fund to boost local economies

Unprecedented reforms to speed up the delivery of schools, colleges, hospitals and other NHS buildings have been announced by Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP today (3 December 2020).

A new fast track for public service buildings including schools, colleges, universities, prisons and hospitals will be delivered more quickly through the planning system with a faster, more streamlined planning process.

Currently, these buildings can have small extensions without the need for a full planning application. Today's [proposals](#) help to deliver more classrooms and hospital space by enabling them to extend further, faster.

Where a full planning application remains required, such as to build entirely new schools and hospitals, the process will be streamlined to speed up local decision making so that work can continue at pace to deliver public services for the community.

Councils will need to make decisions on these important buildings as a priority and have a legal duty to decide major public service development applications within 10 weeks. Currently, some planning applications are left for many months without a decision.

Proposals will also help tackle the housing shortage by enabling commercial premises to be converted into new homes while giving high streets a new lease of life – removing eyesores and transforming unused and derelict buildings, while making the most of our brownfield land.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

The new fast track for public services makes it simpler and quicker to deliver the schools and hospitals we promised to build in our manifesto. We expect these vital buildings to be approved in weeks, not months and are reforming the planning system so it works for the NHS, our schools and other vital public services.

Like the rest of the planning reforms, these changes will also help to protect and create thousands of jobs in the construction industry.

The new homes will be delivered through a fast track planning process instead of a full planning application. These homes will still be subject to high standards, which have been raised in recent months to ensure they provide for adequate natural light and meet space standards.

The right to be converted to homes does not apply to certain buildings including pubs, theatres and live music venues, recognising the important role they play in communities and their contribution to local heritage.

Investing in new housing is key to delivering more affordable, secure and green homes for families across England and in driving the growth and regeneration of local areas. Official figures show that last year more than 243,000 new homes were delivered in England – the highest number since 1987.

Last week, the Spending Review confirmed nearly £20 billion of investment in new homes to help us go even further. This includes a National Home Building Fund investing £7.1 billion over 4 years alongside more than £12 billion being invested in affordable housing.

The Spending Review also included a new £4 billion Levelling Up Fund. This will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery.

Last August, the government published [Planning for the future](#) – its longer-term plans to overhaul England's outdated planning system to deliver the high-quality, sustainable homes communities need. The government is currently analysing the consultation responses and will respond in due course.

The government is [consulting](#) on the introduction of a new right to allow for the change of use from any use, or mix of uses, from the commercial, business and service use class (Class E) to residential use (Class C3).

This right will provide much needed new homes across the country, giving clarity and planning certainty, and attract footfall to high streets that new residents will bring. All new homes would be required to meet national space standards.

The existing right for extensions of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals is subject to size limits, limiting extensions or additional buildings to no more than 25% of the gross floorspace of the original buildings with a maximum cap of 100 square metres, or 250 square metres in the case of schools. It also restricts the height of new buildings to 5 metres.

The consultation proposes to amend the right to allow such uses to expand their facilities by up to 25% of the footprint of the current buildings on the site at the time the legislation is brought into force, or up to 250 square metres, whichever is the greater. This would allow greater flexibility

for those sites that have enlarged or developed additional buildings over time and flexibility for those premises with a smaller footprint.

To provide further flexibility, it is also proposed that the height limit is raised from 5 metres to 6 metres, excluding plant on the roof, except where it is within 10 metres of the boundary or curtilage.

School playing fields will continue to be protected from development. The existing permitted development right to allow the erection, extensions and expansion of schools, colleges, universities and hospitals has a condition exempting development on land used as a playing field in the past 5 years from development. The proposals to expand this right would retain this condition, meaning that playing fields are and will continue to be exempt.

[Live test of EU exit contingency plans on M20 in Kent](#)

Highways England and its partners in the Kent Resilience Forum will carry out a live test to mobilise a moveable barrier system on a section of the M20 from Friday 11 December. It will mean that parts of the motorway are closed between Maidstone and Ashford for four nights, with signed diversions in place.

The barrier will be used to create a new layout with a contraflow system. Once deployed, this will allow traffic to continue travelling in both directions on the motorway at the same time as port bound HGVs are queued, if necessary, on the coastbound carriageway until they can travel through to the Port of Dover or Eurotunnel.

The barrier is part of Operation Brock, a series of measures aimed at keeping the M20 open in both directions during periods of cross-Channel disruption. During the test the barrier will be installed and then removed.

It is much quicker to deploy than previous systems which took weeks to install and remove, and allows more traffic to continue using the motorway, off local roads. It plays a key part in managing any disruption at the ports after the EU exit date, 31 December 2020.

Highways England south east operations director Nicola Bell said:

We have again worked extensively with our partners in Kent and are confident that this test will provide a valuable dress rehearsal into the operation of our Kent-wide port disruption contingency measures. The test will help us to fine tune Operation Brock, finding ways to make the deployment quicker whenever the barrier is

needed, whether it be in preparation for transition, or other disruption to cross-channel services.

Operation Brock will keep Kent moving, and we thank road users in advance for their patience while the test is taking place.

Transport Secretary Grant Shapps said:

Kent is a critical link to one of our busiest trade routes, and this state-of-the-art technology will ensure that we can keep the local road network moving.

Testing this barrier now will ensure that if the system is needed it can be quickly and safely deployed, helping drivers get to where they need to be – even in the event of disruption at the end of the transition period and to assist with any other future disruption caused for any reason.

To ensure that Highways England and its Kent Resilience Forum partners are ready to manage any disruption at the ports after the EU exit date, Operation Brock needs to be active by 31 December 2020. The live test is being used to review each stage of the deployment and removal of the barrier and the other traffic management needed for Operation Brock.

To make sure the barrier is deployed and removed safely, the M20 will be closed coastbound between junction 7 (for Maidstone) and junction 9 (Ashford), and London-bound between junctions 9 and 8 (Maidstone East), overnight (8pm to 8am) on Friday 11, Saturday 12, Sunday 13, and Monday 14 December, returning to normal operation by 8am on Tuesday 15 December. Whenever the M20 is closed, signed diversions will be in place.

At the end of the test the barrier will be returned to the London-bound hard shoulder.

What will the M20 look like during the trial?

- The M20 will close in both directions overnight between junctions 7 and 9 (coastbound) and junctions 9 and 8 (London-bound) on Friday 11 December for the installation of the moveable barrier.
- When the M20 reopens by 8am on Saturday 12 December, the contraflow will be in place in its initial phase. Drivers will need to follow the different layout on the M20 from just north of Junction 8 (for Hollingbourne/Leeds) to Junction 9 (Ashford). Lorries heading for mainland Europe will be routed down the coastbound carriageway, with a 30mph speed limit in place. All other traffic will be directed onto the contraflow, with two lanes in each direction operating at 50mph.
- The M20 will close in both directions overnight between junctions 7 and 9 (coastbound) and junctions 9 and 8 (London-bound) at 8pm on Saturday 12 December and reopen by 8am on Sunday 13 December with the contraflow now open in its final phase.

- The M20 will again close overnight between junctions 7 and 9 (coastbound) and junctions 9 and 8 (London-bound) at 8pm on Sunday 13 December for removal of traffic management on the coastbound carriageway.
- When the M20 reopens by 8am on Monday 14 December, the coastbound carriageway will be back to normal, with all traffic management removed. The London-bound carriageway will be open but some traffic management – including the moveable barrier – will still be in place. Speed restrictions will apply. The London-bound carriageway will be closed overnight between junctions 9 and 8 at 8pm on Monday 14 December with the moveable barrier being moved to the far side of the hard shoulder.
- The London-bound M20 will reopen by 8am on Tuesday 15 December, with the M20 back to its normal layout in both directions, with three lanes operating at the national speed limit.

About Operation Brock

Operation Brock is a series of measures which crucially keeps the M20 open in both directions using a contraflow system. As with previous deployments in 2019, Operation Brock has stages that can be deployed sequentially, scaling up or down to meet demand.

When Operation Brock is in force it is a legal requirement to use the signed routes only for HGV journeys to Port of Dover and Eurotunnel.

Depending on the scale of disruption, and whether HGVs are travelling to Port of Dover or Eurotunnel, they will be directed to a holding site.

Failure to comply with instructions may result in fines and further delays.

Kent Police take decisions on when to use the different phases of the system. Options include:

- A20 Dover TAP: A queuing system which holds lorries until space becomes available at the Port.
- M20 Moveable Barrier: A concrete barrier that can be deployed quickly between junctions 8 and 9 of the M20 to install a contraflow. HGVs bound for Dover and/or Eurotunnel will be held on the coastbound carriageway.
- Manston Airfield: an off-road site designed to hold traffic heading for the Port of Dover. Border readiness checks will take place here to ensure hauliers have the correct paperwork.
- Ashford Sevington Inland Border Facility: an off-road site next to junction 10A of the M20, likely to be used if the M20 contraflow approaches capacity.

For more information on Operation Brock and other contingency measures in Kent, visit:

[How Operation Brock will affect your journey](#)

[Government advice for car drivers in Europe after Brexit](#)

[Government advice for bus and coach drivers in Europe after Brexit](#)

[Government advice for HGV drivers in Europe after Brexit](#)

[How Kent County Council has prepared for Brexit](#)

General enquiries

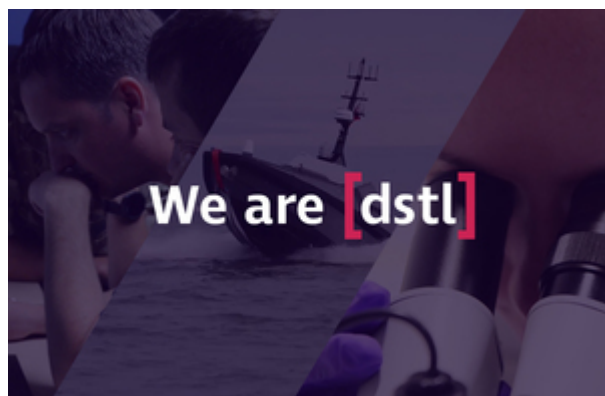
Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[Behind the scenes at Dstl: video](#)

News story

Watch the incredible range of work we do, from robots to wargaming, in just over a minute.



The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) is the science inside UK defence and security.

But what does that mean?

If you've ever wondered what happens behind the scenes at Dstl, this video takes you through some of the highlights of our life-saving work, carried out by our world-class technology experts and scientists.

[We are Dstl](#)

[Find out more about Dstl.](#)

Published 3 December 2020

Towards a data quality culture – launching a framework for government

Today we are launching a new [framework for data quality management in government](#): Towards a data quality culture. We have developed it in collaboration with the Government Digital Service, using best practice drawn from organisations across government.

Getting data quality right means a lot more than data cleansing. It means knowing the quality of data, sharing that information with others and taking the right action to address problems. The framework contains principles and approaches that can help people to better manage data quality in their organisations. They are designed to help people to establish better data quality management through evidence-based, proactive assessments and effective, targeted improvements.

Why it matters

Data has never been more important. It underpins everything government does – our services, our decisions and our policies. It is vitally important that we have data we can trust, and trust starts with good quality data.

We are working with other government initiatives, such as the [Data Standards Authority](#), to improve the way government stores, manages and processes its data. Our remit crosses all of government in the UK.

What will change

We are asking organisations to put their data on a path towards better quality. We want them to:

- Commit to data quality
- Know their users and their users needs
- Assess quality throughout the data lifecycle
- Communicate data quality clearly and effectively
- Anticipate changes affecting data quality

We know that change takes time but, by making incremental changes to the way they manage their data quality, organisations can strengthen their data and their decisions.

Next steps

This is the start of our journey. The framework will grow and iterate over the next two years. We are currently working on training and guidance to support data practitioners in embedding the framework in their organisation.

A thank you

This framework would not exist without the support and contributions of organisations including the [Home Office](#), the [Office for National Statistics](#), [NHS Digital](#), the [Environment Agency](#), the [Data Standards Authority](#), the [Cabinet Office](#) and [Government Digital Service](#). We are extremely grateful for their work in bringing existing best practice together.

Help us support you

We have an ambitious plan to support the public sector to understand, assess, and improve data quality, but we need your help to achieve this. If you want to talk to us about the framework or want to know more about our work, email us at DQHub@ons.gov.uk or tweet us at [@DQHubUKGov](https://twitter.com/DQHubUKGov).

UK statement on Afghan peace talks

Press release

The UK welcomes progress in peace talks. The two sides have reached an agreement which will allow the start of more substantive negotiations to take place.



Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for the Commonwealth and South Asia, said:

I commend the perseverance and effort of the two negotiating sides in reaching common ground after decades of conflict. This is an important step in the Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace talks.

I hope this development leads to a political settlement and a comprehensive ceasefire that the Afghan people want and deserve.

For talks to stand a real chance of success, there is a pressing need for a significant reduction in violence: the people of Afghanistan have suffered for too long.

While there is still a long way to go, this agreement shows both sides are able to work together in the pursuit of lasting peace. Only an inclusive political settlement negotiated between Afghans will end this conflict. The UK will continue to support Afghanistan on this journey towards stability and security.

Published 3 December 2020