

Government steps in to help homeowners caught up in 'EWS1' process

- Agreement that buildings without cladding not subject to EWS1
- Nearly 450,000 homeowners set to benefit
- Government funding to train 2000 more building assessors to speed up valuations
- Government working with industry to ensure professional indemnity insurance is available for assessors

Owners of flats in buildings without cladding will no longer need an EWS1 form to sell or re-mortgage their property – thanks to an agreement reached today (21 November) between the Government and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), UK Finance and the Building Societies Association (BSA).

This is part of a wider government-led solution to support those homeowners who have unsafe cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

Developed by industry to assess the potential financial impact of cladding on high-rise flats, an external wall fire review process – commonly referred to as 'EWS1' – is being applied to other buildings without cladding. This is stopping some people from selling or moving home and causing unnecessary anxiety for homeowners.

Mr Jenrick and RICS have agreed that buildings without cladding do not need an EWS1 form, clearing the way for up to nearly 450,000 flat owners to sell, move or remortgage their homes.

While building owners are already legally required to undertake fire risk assessments on all blocks of flats, following supplementary guidance published by the Government today, RICS will be working with lenders, valuers and fire safety bodies to develop new advice for surveyors. This will enable surveyors to take a more proportionate approach and reduce the number of buildings where an EWS1 assessment is needed.

Further, the Government has announced nearly £700,000 to train more assessors, speeding up the valuation process for homeowners in cases where an EWS1 form is required. This training will be delivered by RICS from January and will mean up to 200 additional assessors will be qualified to carry out the EWS1 assessment within a month, 900 within three months, and 2,000 within six months.

The Government is also exploring ways to address ongoing concerns around the availability of professional indemnity insurance and welcomes industry's progress on developing a portal where lenders, valuers and leaseholders will be able to find out if their building already has an existing EWS1, thereby reducing the demand for duplicate forms.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Through no fault of their own, some flat-owners have been unable to sell or re-mortgage their homes - and this cannot be allowed to continue.

That's why the Government has secured agreement that the EWS1 form will not be needed on buildings where there is no cladding; providing certainty for the almost 450,000 homeowners who may have felt stuck in limbo. However, this is only part of a wider solution and we continue to support those homeowners who do have cladding on their buildings and where there is still more to do.

I welcome the support we have received from RICS and industry to resolve this matter and will be working urgently with lenders to resolve these challenges, ensuring that EWS1 forms are requested only where absolutely necessary and that the number of surveyors able to complete them is increased urgently to meet demand.

RICS CEO Sean Tompkins said:

We are aware of the severe impact this has had on some homeowners and we agree that buildings without cladding should not be subject to the process. We will be taking forward work with industry on this.

Further, we recognise the acute market shortage of fire engineers to carry out EWS1 assessments and welcome the Government's support on working with us to upskill other regulated professions, such as Chartered Building Surveyors, to create additional capacity in the market.

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New UK Government Covid testing site opens in Glasgow

The UK Government has today, Saturday 21 November, opened a new walk-through coronavirus testing centre at St Francis Community Centre in the Gorbals in Glasgow. The centre is easily accessible for people without a car.

The new facility at 405 Cumberland Street (G5 0SE) is being provided by the UK Government as part of a UK-wide drive to continue to improve the accessibility of coronavirus testing for local communities. It is operated by Mitie on behalf of the UK Government.

The test centre is part of the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities created in British history. In Scotland, this comprises of six

drive through sites, 14 walk-through sites, 21 mobile units, plus the Glasgow Lighthouse Lab which is working round the clock to process samples.

In Scotland, the UK Government is providing all COVID testing and test processing outside of the NHS. Around two thirds of all daily tests are provided by the UK Government, in support of Scotland's health services.

Tests must be booked in advance at [NHS Inform](#) or by calling 0800 028 2816. People should only book a test if they have coronavirus symptoms (a high temperature, a new and continuous cough, or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste).

UK Government Minister for Scotland, Iain Stewart, said:

The UK Government is helping all parts of the UK fight the coronavirus pandemic.

Testing is vital, helping to manage local outbreaks and protecting people's livelihoods. The UK Government is providing the bulk of Covid testing in Scotland, and this new walk-through centre is just the latest in our extensive testing network.

We are pleased to be working with local and commercial partners. These sites are not possible without the hard work of many people. I would like to thank everyone involved for their incredible efforts for the good of the country at this difficult time.

Simon Venn, Mitie Chief Government & Strategy Officer, said:

Our priority during the pandemic is to support the nation's efforts to fight COVID-19 and help keep the country running. Testing is a critical part of the UK's strategy to combat coronavirus and we're proud to support the UK Government with this vital task. A big thank you to all the NHS staff, Mitie employees and other frontline heroes in Glasgow, who are working tirelessly to keep us all safe.

Dr Linda de Caestecker, Director of Public Health, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said:

I am very pleased that we have a new walk through testing centre in Glasgow to allow members of the public to access testing when they need it.

Our Public Health Protection Unit and Test and Protect Team continue to contact trace positive cases and clusters in our community. I want to thank the public for their cooperation in reducing spread of the virus and in getting tested as soon as they have symptoms.

Please remain vigilant. The general measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 remain the same – social distancing, regular hand washing, and being on the look-out for symptoms.

Ocean mapping satellite to help UK scientists tackle climate change

In the past two decades, space has played an increasingly crucial role in efforts to monitor and combat climate change. Satellites are indispensable for collecting data on sea levels, with each year since 1993 seeing an average rise of just over 3mm. Sea level rises put coastal communities at risk and it is vital that researchers understand how climate change is reshaping Earth's coastlines and how fast this is happening.

Thanks to UK Space Agency funding, experts across the UK's ocean and climate community, including at the Met Office and National Oceanography Centre, will be at the forefront of analysing the most accurate data yet on global sea levels and how our oceans are rising in response to climate change.

The Sentinel-6 satellite, which is the size of a small 4x4 car and will orbit around Earth 830 miles above our planet, will collect data that is indispensable for ocean and weather forecasts and climate understanding over the next decade.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

Tracking rising sea levels is one of the most important indicators of our planet warming up. This government-backed satellite will arm our leading scientists, researchers and meteorologists with critical data to measure the true impact of climate change on our planet, helping improve weather forecasting to better plan for floods and informing our ambitious efforts for a green industrial revolution.

The UK spends hundreds of millions of pounds every year on flood and coastal defences. Sentinel-6 will allow a more accurate prediction of sea level rise and storm surge, reducing the risk of damage from unexpectedly high floods.

Dr Matthew Palmer, lead scientist on sea level rise from the Met Office Hadley Centre, said:

Sea-level rise poses one of the greatest socio-economic challenges associated with climate change. Space-based observations since the

1990s have revolutionised our understanding of rates of sea-level rise around the globe.

The Sentinel-6 observations are critical for ongoing monitoring of global sea level and revealing the spatial pattern of rise associated with climate change. These new observations will play a key role in the development of improved modelling systems and projections on a range of timescales by providing invaluable insights into sea-level variability and change around the world.

John Siddorn, Head of Ocean Forecasting R&D and co-Chair of the National Partnership for Ocean Prediction, said:

Altimeter satellites are fundamental to ocean monitoring and prediction – it is no coincidence that most ocean reanalysis datasets, used to understand the marine environment, start around the early 1990s, to coincide with the launch of the first reference satellite altimeter missions.

The Sentinel-6 satellites ensure the continuation of this vital data record for the next decade, safeguarding our ocean monitoring and prediction capability that is so important for marine operations as well as understanding the changing world we live in.

The joint European and US satellite is named Sentinel-6 Michael Freilich, after Dr Michael Freilich, the former director of NASA's Earth Science Division. The European contribution is shared between ESA, EUMETSAT and the EU. It will provide the only means of measuring global sea level changes with sufficient accuracy to detect a sea level rise due to climate change, helping to protect the 600 million people who live in vulnerable coastal areas across the globe. It will also improve weather forecasts.

Alongside the funding for Sentinel-6, the UK Space Agency also supports the UK's world leading capabilities in Earth Observation and climate change through national and international programmes such as the European Space Agency (ESA). In November 2019, the UK Space Agency committed over £200 million of investment in Earth Observation at ESA.

The UK is working on new missions to unlock our understanding of our planet, including the climate change missions TRUTHS and FORUM, a global forest-mapping mission Biomass, and MicroCarb which will measure sources and sinks of carbon, the principal greenhouse gas driving global warming.

Christine Gommenginger, National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, said:

New data from Sentinel-6 will benefit our ongoing research into quantifying and understanding the drivers of variability, trends and acceleration in coastal sea level and ocean surface waves.

New discoveries about these complex interactions and exchanges could hold the key to significantly broadening the research communities' understanding of the ocean and climate. Thus, we will be able to contribute expert research and insights to UK and international change makers, and to the public, for the benefit of all. We welcome the launch of the Sentinel-6 satellite and congratulate everyone involved.

Sentinel-6 is part of the European Copernicus Programme, which has revolutionised understanding of the critical role the ocean plays in climate and the ocean-atmospheric interactions which produce extreme weather events.

Airbus Defence and Space in Stevenage designed, manufactured and tested the propulsion module for the Sentinel-6 satellite. The hydrazine propulsion system with eight thrusters will maintain the 1.3 ton satellite in the correct orbit for its mission. Airbus in the UK has built more than 100 satellite propulsion systems, including for the twin mission Sentinel 6B, which is due for launch in 2025 and will advance these measurements for at least another five years.

This mission will take the role of radar altimetry reference mission, continuing the long-term record of measurements of sea-surface height started in 1992 by the French-US Topex Poseidon and then the Jason series of satellite missions.

The Philippines and the United Kingdom: old friends, new horizons

As the United Kingdom's Minister with responsibility for relations with the Philippines, I was delighted to visit Manila for the first time this week. I met leading figures in government, business and beyond and was pleased to play my part in building on the broad and ever expanding range of areas where our two countries work together. Although I'm sorry that because of COVID-19 I wasn't able to get out and about to see the country and meet as many people as I would have liked.

Our countries, while separated by nearly 11,000 kilometres, enjoy close and longstanding links. But we have never rested on our laurels and have always sought to do more together.

I am delighted that next year, the 75th year of our formal diplomatic relations, will see the launch of an Enhanced Partnership. This will allow us to continue to drive forward our trade relations building on an already strong £2bn of bilateral trade and investment and growing the more than 200 British companies currently operating in the Philippines such as Shell,

AstraZeneca, GSK and Diageo to name a few.

It will allow us to deepen our strong collaboration on combatting climate change, with the UK hosting COP26 next year, bringing together heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action. The UK is already partnering the Philippines across areas such as low carbon energy transition and protecting the Philippines' incredible biodiversity.

We can strengthen our links on defence, security and counter-terrorism and foster stronger consular cooperation to protect our citizens and make their lives better when they are a long way from home.

Indeed, our bilateral relations would not be what they are without the close connections between our people. This includes the 20,000 British nationals who have chosen to make the Philippines their home. It also includes the 200,000 Filipinos who have settled in the UK including around 30,000 who have chosen to work in the UK's National Health Service where I can personally attest that they are respected for their compassion, dedication and professional excellence.

It was exciting to discuss our plans for the future this week. My visit also allowed me to spend time discussing the key political issues relevant to our citizens' lives, including human rights. And I was able to take steps to expand our already strong bilateral cooperation on higher education, by signing a statement of commitment, which will help widen the access of Filipino learners to quality higher education and build the competitiveness of higher education institutions in the Philippines.

I know the Philippines has faced great challenges already this typhoon season. I was saddened to watch the dreadful impact of Typhoons Quintas, Rolly and Ulysses in quick succession over recent days, and continue to be inspired by the fortitude of the Philippine people. I was pleased the UK was able to donate £500,000 (PHP 32 million) through our Red Cross partners to support those in greatest humanitarian need immediately following Typhoon Rolly.

Similarly, we must continue to work together to beat the COVID-19 global pandemic which continues to affect our daily lives. I am proud of the work my country has taken forward to ensure that all nations and people around the world will be able to have access to safe and effective vaccines when they are ready. Progress is happening fast. During my time in Manila I discussed cutting-edge collaboration with the Philippines on global access to vaccines, and learned how the UK's public health partnership and support programmes are having an impact.

Alongside our Enhanced Partnership with the Philippines, the UK has deep and enduring relationships with countries across the ASEAN region, and we are committed to bolstering our relationship with ASEAN. We want to cement our commitment to ASEAN through becoming a Dialogue Partner. We believe this status reflects the strength and breadth of the UK offer, both now and in the future. We are grateful for the warm support we have received from the Philippines for this ambition.

Whilst our countries may indeed be old friends, I am confident that we are ready to embrace some brand new horizons in our relations.