

HOUSING SECRETARY SETS OUT PLAN TO RE-START HOUSING MARKET

- *Housing Secretary announces plan to enable people to move home safely and to re-start the housing market in line with social distancing advice*
- *Estate agents' offices can open; viewings are permitted; show homes can open; removal companies and the other essential parts of the sales and letting process are re-started with immediate effect.*
- *More than 450,000 buyers and renters have been unable to progress their plans to move since March.*
- *New guidance to allow extended working hours on construction sites and to make the planning system operate remotely again.*
- *A 'Safe Working Charter' launched by the Government and the Home Builders Federation, enabling home builders to return to work safely.*

Anyone in England can move home if they follow new guidance published by Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick.

Since lockdown restrictions were implemented in March, more than 450,000 people have been unable to progress their plans to move house. All buyers and renters will now be able to complete purchases and view properties in person, while estate agents, conveyancers and removals firms can return to work while following social distancing guidelines.

In another move to unlock the housing market, the Housing Secretary has announced a series of measures to get the country building homes for the future, including:

- *Allowing builders to agree more flexible construction site working hours with their local council, such as staggering builders' arrival times, easing pressure on public transport;*
- *Enabling local councils and developers to publicise planning applications through social media instead of having to rely on posters and leaflets, helping to unblock the service*
- *Support for smaller developers by allowing them to defer payments to local councils, helping those struggling with their cash flow while ensuring communities still receive funding towards local infrastructure in the longer term*

A new Charter has also been launched by the Government and the Home Builders Federation, helping construction sites reopen in line with latest health and safety guidance. Construction companies signing up to the Charter commit to returning to work safely, including working with their subcontractors to implement social distancing, as well as detailed safe working practices.

Housing Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

"Today I am announcing new guidelines to allow the housing market to resume. Our clear plan will enable people to move home safely, covering each aspect of the sales and letting process from viewings to removals.

"Our step by step plan is based on the latest guidance to ensure the safety and protection of everyone involved.

"This critical industry can now safely move forward, and those waiting patiently to move can now do so."

Stewart Baseley, Executive Chairman of the Home Builders Federation, said:

“Over the past week or so many house builders have commenced a gradual return to work, in a structured way that ensures the safety of its workforce and the general public.

“The industry sustains hundreds of thousands of people in numerous roles and associated sectors, boosting local economies across the country. A resumption of work will play a major part in helping the economy recover as well as delivering the homes the country needs.

“It should also provide the supply chain with the confidence it needs to accelerate its own restart. The Charter is the public facing evidence which supports the very detailed protocols individual builders now have in place to ensure safe working on sites.”

John Newcomb, Chief Executive Office of the Builders Merchants Federation, said:

“Safety has the highest priority as the industry returns to work. Over the past three weeks, since the publication of new branch operating guidelines, we have seen increasing numbers of merchants safely re-opening or expanding operations to support their trade customers.

“House builders structured return to site provides even more confidence within the supply chain, and provides further evidence of the construction industry’s determination to assist in the recovery of the UK economy.”

Guidance from Public Health England must continue to be followed. For example, anyone advised to self-isolate should continue to do so and not move home.

Government guidance makes clear that tradespeople including fitters can operate in homes, provided they do so in line with health guidance.

Show homes can also re-open, following social distancing guidance.

The Safe Working Charter compliments detailed guidance available from the Construction Leadership Council on further reducing the risk of infection onsite.

The Government continues to listen to all parts of the housing industry to see what further support may be required.

These measures build on action from the Government to support the economy and protect the capacity of the construction sector, including:

- Introducing more than £330 billion of loans and guarantees to help firms continue operating;
- Deferring self-assessment payments until 2021 – crucial for a sector in which many are self-employed; and
- Providing households across the country with reassurance such as three-month mortgage holidays, including for landlords, alongside a three month ban on tenant evictions.

Notes to editors:

- The Health Protection Regulations previously prohibited home moves unless “reasonably necessary”.

- The list of signatories to the Safe Working Charter can be found on the Home Builders Federation's website [link to: <https://www.hbf.co.uk/policy/coronavirus/charter-safe-working-practice-covid-19/>]
- The Housing Secretary has announced changes to the planning system to help support safe construction, including:
 - o Allowing builders to agree more flexible construction site working hours with their local council. This will make it easier to follow public health guidance onsite and stagger builders' arrival times, making public transport less busy and so reducing the risk of infection.
 - o Enabling planning authorities and developers to publicise planning applications through social media instead of having to rely on posters and leaflets, helping unblock the service and allowing it to support new development.
 - o Providing local councils with more flexibility to support smaller developers by allowing them to defer Community Infrastructure Levy payments. This will help smaller developers struggling with their cashflow due to the pandemic while ensuring communities still receive funding towards local infrastructure in the longer term.