



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick
*Secretary of State for Housing, Communities
and Local Government*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government**

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To all MPs in England

www.gov.uk/mhclg

13 May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The Government's Plan to Restart the Housing Market

The housing market is a key part of our economy, delivering almost 250,000 new homes each year and employing over 2.5 million people across the supply chain, from construction workers to surveyors, estate agents to removal workers. COVID-19 has had a profound impact on housebuilding and transactions, with sales down by over 90 percent in recent months. Today, I am announcing a comprehensive and coherent plan to reopen the market, from extending construction hours to enable the safe return to work on sites, to supporting estate agents to begin viewings and, importantly, giving people the freedom to move home again.

Giving people the freedom to move home

Millions of people in this country move home every year, and the reasons behind each move are intensely personal and often driven by the milestones of our lives. These moves have been frozen and these lives put on hold. As a result of the coronavirus, 450,000 property sales are currently unable to progress. This means young people unable to move into their first home, growing families unable to upsize and older people stuck in accommodation which no longer meets their needs.

We are amending the coronavirus regulations to make it clear that anyone who wishes to move home, can now do so. The new rules will support all parts of the home moving process to restart, from viewings to removals, and will enable people to leave their home to buy or let properties or prepare properties to move into. We have also amended the regulations to make clear that anyone undertaking activities required for the rental or sale of a property can leave their home to do this work where they cannot do so from home. This removes the previous requirement for moves to be "reasonably necessary" and empowers people to once again make their own choice about whether now is the right time to move, based on their lives and their circumstances.

To ensure all home moves are done safely, we have also publishing guidance for both industry and consumers informed by public health advice. This sets out clearly how each part of the home moving process can be done safely and the steps we expect all parties to undertake, including maintaining social distancing and practicing hygiene measures.

Supporting a safe return to construction sites

I am also today implementing measures to support the construction industry to restart work safely. Our housing and construction industries will be key to our wider economic recovery and renewal, protecting jobs and ensuring new homes, hospitals and schools are built. To support this, I am today publishing a Charter with the Home Building Federation, committing signatories to ensuring their construction sites across England are operated safely and in line with public health guidance. Signatories to the Charter, including some of the UK's largest housebuilders, have publicly committed to adopting safe working practice in accordance with government and Construction Leadership Council guidance.

To further support construction sites to operate safely, I am also taking steps to allow more flexible working hours. The written statement I issued today in Parliament and accompanying Q&A on GOV.UK provide clear guidance to councils that, where developers ask for flexibility, they should permit extensions of site hours to at least 9pm on Monday to Saturday. Councils should take local considerations into account and, in general, site hours should not be extended to Sundays and Bank Holidays. However, there may be some cases where it is suitable for sites to operate up 24 hours each day, for instance in areas with no residential properties. These changes will allow construction sites to make simple changes to improve safety, such as staggering start times for their workers and help to reduce pressures on local public transport.

Finally, a working construction system can only develop sites where there is permission to build. Today, I have also issued a written statement in Parliament to ensure that the Planning Inspectorate can continue to operate effectively and remotely. The statement makes clear that site visits should continue, in line with social distancing guidance, and that the use of digital technology and virtual hearings should become the norm. The Inspectorate is now undertaking its first virtual hearings and all enquiries are expected to be done digitally by mid-June, other than in exceptional circumstances. It's time we brought our planning system into the digital age and that's what I intend to do.

Together this clear, coherent and comprehensive plan will support hundreds of thousands of construction workers across England to return to work safely and return the freedom to move home to millions of our fellow citizens. As the housing market starts up again, we all must continue to stay alert, in order to control the virus and save lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath the name.

RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP