Government new home moving guidance published

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By Joey Gardiner 13 May
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The government has published new guidance designed to kick start the housing market after it was effectively shut-down when lockdown measures were introduced in March.

The guidance makes clear that people who wish to move home can do so, where previously it said that only “critical” moves should go ahead.

In addition, the government has published the detail of new planning rules which will allow virtual planning consultations and the deferral of CIL payments by SME developers.

However, these planning changes will not allow large housebuilders to defer CIL payments and the government has not said it plans to extend the timeframe of existing planning permissions, as widely called for.

Yesterday housing secretary Robert Jenrick (pictured, below) said the changes meant “This critical industry can now safely move forward, and those waiting patiently to move can now do so.”

In response to the announcement, housebuilders Taylor Wimpey and Weston Homes have already announced plans to begin reopening showhomes and sales offices .

The new home moving guidance makes clear that new rules will apply to the home buying and selling process, with physical visits to homes expected to be kept to a minimum, be by appointment only, and only where social distancing guidelines can be respected.

The guidance says developers can continue with sales but should “promote virtual viewings”, conduct physical viewings only “by appointment with one household visiting one property at a time” and “clean surfaces between viewings”.

Warranty providers, EPC assessors, tradespeople and surveyors will all be free to visit homes as long as new working guidance is adhered to.

In addition, the RICS said it will at 17.00 today publish further detailed guidance for surveyors on how to conduct physical inspections for mortgage valuations and home surveys.

The planning changes will give local authorities the ability to waive interest charges on non-payment of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for developers with a turnover of less than £45m. The government said it will introduce the relaxation of the CIL regs via an “affirmative amendment” in Parliament, which requires a debate, but that planning authorities would be supported in showing flexibility in the interim period before that takes effect.

Planning application publicity and consultations will be able to be conducted virtually, but the government has not responded to repeated requests from both planners and developer groups that it extend planning permissions due to expire during lockdown, given fears that developers may see permissions lapse while they are unable to get on site, and be forced to suffer the expense and delay of re-applying.

Grant Lipton, co-founder of London-focused developer Great Marlborough Estates, said the news was welcome but that further measures were needed to help the industry recover. He said: “The housing market re-starting is obviously positive news, but it will need more than a press release to give buyers and sellers confidence and so the government needs to look at a range of measures to kick-start activity including a stamp duty holiday.”

Claire Dutch, partner and co-head of planning and environment at law firm Ashurst, welcomed the “raft of helpful measures” on planning but said the lack of action to extend the duration of planning permissions was “an obvious omission”. She said: “Many of the larger developers are facing CIL bills that run into tens of millions and will be disappointed that the relief will not apply to them.”

“An obvious omission is the lack of an extension to the period for developers to implement their planning permissions. Getting on site in the current climate is a real issue. The industry has proposed a number of fixes to this problem and the government still needs to respond to this."