

Land, planning and community engagement

To build sustainable communities where our customers want to live, we need to source high-quality land in the right places. We engage with local people and work with planning authorities to develop and deliver schemes that meet local needs.



2020 highlights

- Rolled-out our new digital platform for assessing and managing sustainability risks at site level
- 25% of our homes in 2020 were built on brownfield land
- Engaged with central Government on issues relating to planning and sustainability
- Adopted virtual consultation methods so community engagement could continue safely during the pandemic and achieved one of the UK's first significant remote planning permissions

Plans and targets

- Update our policies and processes to reflect the risks and opportunities from a changing climate by 2022
- Continue to strengthen our engagement and relationship with the local communities in which we operate

Sustainability and land buying

We take account of sustainability issues from the start of the land buying process, including flood risk, sustainable transport and local economic development.

We review each potential piece of land against the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which aims to ensure that developments are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. We also have our own internal processes and guidance documents that help our teams identify and address relevant sustainability issues for each site. These include our Sustainable Development Checklist, which helps us to assess factors such as how well connected the site is to transport links and the potential impact on habitats and species.

We use a digital platform for assessing and managing sustainability and technical risks associated with land, called LEADR (Land and Environment Assessment of Development Risk). This draws on external environmental databases to help us manage risks associated with land and environmental impacts, including remediation, flooding, biodiversity and archaeology.

We often transform derelict or contaminated land into new communities, which helps support urban regeneration. Around 25% of our homes in 2020 were built on brownfield land (2019: 29%).

See page 9 for information on our approach to sustainable transport.

Mitigating flood risk and climate change adaptation

Climate change is increasing the risk and frequency of flooding in many locations across the UK.

We take the risk of flooding on our developments extremely seriously and identify potential flood risk as part of our site selection process. We use the Environment Agency's flood mapping tools, and take account of their input during our planning consultations. We do not buy land unless we can mitigate flood risk.

Our green infrastructure guide helps our teams to manage water on site. We integrate sustainable drainage systems (SDS) that decrease flow rates to watercourses, increase infiltration into the ground and improve water quality such as ponds, swales, permeable paving, retention basins, wetlands, green roofs, infiltration trenches and soakaways. Many of these features also contribute to good placemaking.

Flood risk is one of the factors considered in our climate change scenario analysis (see page 18).

We will be doing further work on other aspects of climate change adaptation as part of our environmental strategy.

Measuring economic impacts

Our developments provide a boost to the local economy, both during construction and once new residents move in.

Our Economic Benefits Toolkit helps us understand and communicate socio-economic benefits to stakeholders during the planning process. Using the toolkit we can estimate: the number of direct site and indirect supply chain jobs that our developments will create and their economic value; expected revenue gains for local businesses; the impact of new infrastructure and amenities; and new revenue for local authorities, including from council tax and business rates.

Community engagement

We build in communities for years, making a significant impact on the area and its people. We aim to build good relationships with local people throughout this time by communicating proactively and consistently.

Every one of our sites has a tailored planning and community engagement strategy and a clear point of contact. We use a range of methods to inform local people about our plans, including our website, meetings, exhibitions, workshops and information boards. We aim to reach a wide range of stakeholders, including neighbouring residents and property owners, potential customers, local authorities, businesses, schools and other groups.

During 2020, we issued guidance to help our planning teams use virtual consultation methods to allow engagement to continue safely during the pandemic. This included making greater use of social media, online exhibitions and virtual forums.

Our Political and Community Engagement Toolkit helps our teams to consistently engage a wide range of stakeholders in the planning process.

Working with local and central Government

We engage with local authorities, parish councils, Homes England, the Greater London Authority (GLA), the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and other public sector organisations to understand their priorities and share our views.

As well as site-specific engagement, we participate in the development of strategic frameworks, Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans, which consider broader development needs and enable local people to shape new developments in their area.

We engage with central Government on issues relating to planning and sustainability. In 2020, this included:

- **COVID-19 impact on the planning system**
We engaged with the Government on how to enable planning processes to continue safely during the pandemic.

- **Planning for the Future, White Paper**

We shared our views on proposals to deliver a simpler and more effective planning system. We support a number of proposals, including a revised approach to plan making, whilst maintaining a key focus on community engagement and meeting legal tests to underpin the plan led approach. We also highlighted the potential risk to housing delivery and infrastructure from the introduction of a consolidated infrastructure levy and removal of the policy requirement for councils to maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites.

- **Building a Safer Future** – We continue to participate directly and via the HBF in consultations on proposals for reform of the building safety regulatory system and introduction of a new regulator in the form of a new homes ombudsman.

- **Future Homes Standard** – We provided views to consultations on this proposed legislation and associated updates to building regulations. We support measures to reduce the carbon footprint and energy consumption of new homes but also highlighted potential challenges, such as increased load on the grid from all electric homes, added pressure to the supply chain and skills shortages.

We also made representations for the: Development Corporation Reform – Technical Consultation; First Homes Scheme Consultation; New Model for Shared Ownership Consultation; and to the Scottish Government on the National Planning Framework 4 – Housing Technical Discussion Paper; and Scottish Planning Policy and Housing – Technical Consultation on proposed policy amendments.

We engage with Government through our membership of industry organisations such as the Home Builders Federation (HBF) and the British Property Federation (BPF). Regional businesses are also members of trade associations, for example our Scottish businesses are members of Homes for Scotland. We engage directly with professional bodies and made representations to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) consultation on Assessing Financial Viability in Planning.

We are members of five Homes England regional Delivery Partner Panels.

Compliance with planning requirements

We aim to work constructively with planning authorities to agree the details of our planning obligations for each development, including affordable housing, local infrastructure, and facilities. See page 9 for more information.

We use the results of our community engagement to help us develop planning proposals that are financially viable and meet local needs. Each planning application integrates a clear development plan, enabling planning authorities to monitor progress.

Once planning permission is granted, our technical teams monitor compliance with planning agreements and obligations. We also track build rates to make sure that each scheme is being managed efficiently and new homes are delivered on time. This is overseen by the Managing Director in each regional business.

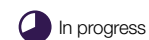
As at 31 December 2020, we are building on 96% of sites with implementable planning.

Progress against targets

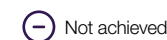
Target	Progress	Achieved?
Source more than 40% of completions from the strategic pipeline	We sourced 55% of completions from the strategic pipeline.	
Increase landbank efficiency – reduce length of short term owned and controlled landbank by c.1 year to 4-4.5 years	In 2020 we raised net proceeds of £510 million through an equity raise to take advantage of opportunities to invest in the land market. This, together with the reduction in completions in the year as a result of COVID-19, caused our landbank years to exceed the medium term target.	
Roll-out our new integrated digital platform for assessing and managing sustainability risks at site level	We have now rolled out LEADR (Land and Environment Assessment of Development Risk), our digital platform for assessing and managing sustainability risks at site level.	



Achieved



In progress



Not achieved