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Speech

Falling back in love with the future

Delivered at RIBA on 19 December 2023

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Christmas is nearly upon us. And so many of the Christmas traditions we cherish owe so much to a special time in our past. The Victorian era.

The melodies of our most popular carols – God Rest You Merry Gentlemen, O Come All You Faithful, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, were the products of the 1840s and 1850s. The Christmas tree was introduced to England in 1840 by Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. And Charles Dickens' depictions of the season – in the Christmas Carol of course, but also in Pickwick Papers and the Mystery of Edwin Drood – have shaped forever how we see this special time.

Today's celebrations may be shaped by the spirit of Victorian Christmas pasts. But the Victorians themselves were not haunted by the desire to look backwards. The Victorian Age was one of growth, innovation, expansion and ambition. They looked to the future with hope. It was in the nineteenth century that our great cities expanded to become the workshops of the world, the forcing houses of invention and the homes to swelling millions.

London spread east as the docklands became a window to the world, west to graceful suburbs such as Holland Park and Notting Hill, north to embrace villages such as Highgate within its ambit, and south from Clapham to Crystal Palace. It became the greatest city on the globe.

And it was joined by others. The Manchester of the Free Trade Hall and Halle Orchestra, the Birmingham of Chamberlain and the Jewellery Quarter, the Newcastle of Richard Grainger's Grey Street and the Armstrong Works, the Leeds of John Marshall's monumental Temple Mill, George Gilbert Scott's Church of St John the Evangelist, and the first electric tram network in England – all testament to a future-facing embrace of development and growth.

And it seems to me that in that spirit we can embrace a better future. I want us – as a nation – once again to be always in the forefront of innovation, to be re-imagining and regenerating our great cities, to be commissioning new homes of beauty designed to endure, to be planning new

urban quarters which buzz commercially and attract talent, to be providing the new infrastructure which accelerates growth, to be building, growing, daring.

I want us to fall back in love with the future.

Because the truth is that while the last 13 years has seen growth, regeneration and innovation flourish across much of the country it has not extended far enough, we have not grown fast enough.

My department, the department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, is on a mission to ensure that we see growth spread across the country – more towns and cities regenerated, more communities empowered to grow, more homes built and more innovation unleashed.

That is why we passed the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, which Jack referenced earlier. It's why we're spending billions on urban regeneration, while we have a new approach to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects led by my brilliant colleague Lee Rowley, and why he and I today publish our new National Planning Policy Framework.

This infrastructure plan and the new Planning Framework have been designed to deal with the concerns, objections and obstacles which have stood in the way of the development we need, in the places that we need it.

Over decades now we have not been providing the infrastructure we need at the pace we need it, nor have we been building the homes we need in the numbers we need to see.

We have made progress – significant progress – over those last 13 years. Crossrail in London, new nuclear power stations, the roll-out of 5G and super fast broadband, new life science labs in Cambridge, renewable energy clusters in Teeside and Humberside, materials science centres in Manchester, [political content removed], they all show the drive necessary to own the future.

That is however, necessary but not sufficient. Progress but not enough. Growth but not yet at the rate we need.

So what are the obstacles we still need to overcome and how will this [political content removed] Government overcome them, now and in the future?

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Let me turn to housing first.

The figures on housing to date, as I mention, constitute a considerable record of achievement. More than 230,000 new homes in the last year. More than 900,000 in the last four years. On course to meet our target of one million new homes in this Parliament.

But strong as that record is, it could be stronger still.

And the uncomfortable truth is that we have not built more because in many parts of the country there is a resistance to new development.

And the truth is uncomfortable for those of us ardent for new development because that resistance is not unreasonable.

Those who were first characterised by the late Nicholas Ridley as NIMBYs – the not in my backyard objectors to new development – have often had good reason to just say no.

As the late economist Mancur Olson pointed out, the gains of new development are spread widely but the difficulties are experienced locally.

So what are these concerns? Well, first, new development has too often been of poor quality – ugly or identikit – without the beauty that is at the heart of all great architecture. I am an unabashed champion of aesthetic excellence in the built environment, an admirer of architects' skill and vision, a believer in their mission to make homes more than just a machine for living but a delight to the eye and a statement of belief in the future.

But my conviction that we need to build more beautifully is not just a matter of personal taste. It makes sense in public policy terms.

As recent polling by YouGov and Bradshaw Advisory shows, opposition to new homes in communities drops dramatically when that development is beautiful. Asked how they felt about a large increase in homes in their local area, 43% of those surveyed were resolutely opposed – but this falls to only 20% when reassured that development would be in-keeping with local architecture and traditions.

And the market too shows the merit in building to exacting aesthetic standards. Poundbury, the development which His Majesty the King championed and which was so carefully master-planned next to Dorchester, is not to everyone's taste. But it is undeniably built with great attention to aesthetic considerations. It is also a community where the difference between housing tenures is impossible for any visitor to discern. Homes for social rent and those which are owner-occupied nestle together in harmony.

And the result of this thoughtful planning? Homes in Poundbury are worth more on the open market than those in the county town of Dorchester itself. The new is – here – more valuable than the old. People have fallen back in love with the future. But that is very far from the case with many contemporary new developments and extensions to existing settlements.

An even bigger objection to new development than the absence of beauty is the lack of new infrastructure to accompany new homes. Existing communities which see new homes built too often do not see the new primary care and GP surgeries, schools, road improvements and other amenities which should follow. They experience development as additional pressure on school places, longer waiting times for appointments and treatment, greater congestion, an impaired quality of life. And again this is neither an isolated or exceptional concern. That same recent YouGov polling I referenced a moment ago makes this point starkly – if promised that housing would be accompanied by

more local services such as GPs surgeries and schools, support for development rockets.

Alongside that concern on infrastructure rests an anxiety about the lack of democratic control over new development. The way in which local plan-making can, currently, be challenged and overturned, the sense that numbers of new homes are crudely imposed rather than thoughtfully calculated, the feeling that local elected representatives of all parties cannot shape their communities in the way they would wish. All this has stoked opposition to new development and, at its most severe, has led to a failure of local authorities to adopt new plans for any homes at all.

There are also – legitimate – environmental concerns about new development. Especially when it occurs outside existing urban areas. Green fields are lost for ever. Habitats eroded. Biodiversity harmed.

Of course there are some objectors to new development whose affection for, say, newts was a love which dared not speak its name before the planning application went in. And the way in which some existing environmental regulations work is over-complex, inefficient and counter-productive.

But the environmental externalities of new development – especially on green fields rich with wildlife – are real. Our interventions, including those flowing from the Environment Act, mean that these effects are now managed much better than ever before. Even so, unless we can show that new development is concentrated in areas where the loss of environmental amenity is lowest and can actually lead to enhanced biodiversity then resistance will endure.

A final objection to new development links all of the above concerns. Residents who have grown up in, or moved to, a community which they have grown to love all share an attachment to neighbourhood. A sense of place matters. We do not live in units but in homes. And we not only want our homes to be well-constructed – warm, safe, beautiful and decent, we want them to be well-connected – part

of a community where human interaction is natural, rich and easy.

And that is why planning is so important. Why the role of planners in local government – and indeed by developers – matters so much. Planning is the means by which we bring harmony to development, make places cohere and people connect, planners give communities a heart by appealing to our souls, planners take landscapes which have been neglected, despoiled or left fallow and build something to delight the eye and command affection.

It is a great pity that the skill and vision of our planning professionals has not always enjoyed the respect and status it deserves. I am determined to ensure that planning is recognised as it should be as the profession which answers to and serves our deepest needs as social animals – the quest for community.

The five factors I have mentioned as crucial to winning back support for new development – which will allow us to fall back in love with the future – are beauty, infrastructure, democracy, the environment and neighbourhood. Together – B, I, D, E, N – they spell Biden. I hope I will not be misinterpreted by anyone when I say I am violently pro BIDEN.

I should add that one of my civil servant colleagues pointed out that arranged in a different order they of course spell in bed. But I thought “In Bed with DLUHC” might not be the best slogan for developers everywhere.

THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The development of our new National Planning Policy Framework has been informed by these five principles. It affirms the vital importance of planning, the central role of planning professionals in shaping our communities anew, and the route to many more, and more beautiful, homes through a planned system.

And the NPPF, alongside the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, makes the delivery of

infrastructure faster and easier. We strengthen the democratic voice in shaping new development. And, alongside other measures which we have introduced such as biodiversity net gain, we better protect and enhance our natural environment. And we've put neighbourhood at the heart of place-making.

The new National Planning Policy Framework confirms that the standard method of assessing housing need – the statistical model which projects our requirement for future housing based on population growth and affordability criteria – remains the basis on which communities should plan for new homes. It has always been the case that this number was supposed to be advisory for local authorities. But that principle has more often been honoured in the breach than in the observance.

Those local authorities that have sought to vary the number in order to take account of the need to protect the Green Belt or other areas of environmental, heritage or aesthetic importance have found the Planning Inspectorate invincibly attached to the number first thought of, with only very few exceptions.

The new NPPF now, more clearly, upholds the spirit of the original intention. Local authorities have the comfort of knowing that they need not re-draw the green belt or sacrifice protected landscapes to meet housing numbers.

But let me be clear. While this is a more robust assertion of previous principles and protections, it is not a route to the evasion of responsibilities. Local authorities must provide rigorous evidence justifying their departure from assessed housing need, they must do everything to identify other land suitable for development, and while the Planning Inspectorate will respect well-made cases, it will not accept under-shooting that is not firmly rooted in environmental or other safeguards. This is about sensitive adjustment in meeting targets, not their abandonment.

And to incentivise further the early adoption of robust plans with a strong pipeline of future homes,

we will ensure that any local authority which has an up-to-date plan in place demonstrating how houses will be built over a five year term will be afforded new and stronger protections from speculative development occurring in areas which the local community have not zoned for development.

And these protections will be supplemented by changes to the Housing Delivery Test. This Test acts as an assessment of an authority's previous three years of housing delivery and where there has been under-delivery, consequences rightly follow.

All authorities will continue to be subject to these consequences: producing an Action Plan for improvement where their delivery falls below 95% of need; and will become subject to the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery falls below 75%. However the 20% buffer – which an authority needs to add to its housing land supply where housing delivery falls below 85% of its requirement – will now only apply to those authorities that do not have an up-to-date plan in place. So all of the incentives are clear: you should have an up-to-date plan in place.

And the new Framework also places beauty and sensitivity to the existing built environment at the heart of plan-making. Local authorities have licence to resist insensitive over-densification in areas with a defined character – whether that's the suburbs of Bexley or Barnet – through the adoption of appropriate design codes. And we have made the much wider adoption of design codes both easier and more attractive through the work of our new public body which champions beauty in building – the Office for Place.

And, in tandem with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, the NPPF also facilitates the delivery of new infrastructure. Our Infrastructure Levy will not only give local authorities additional resource to fund public services, it will also actively incentivise development in urban areas, where schools, surgeries and transport links already exist.

Incentivising urban development and regeneration, about which I will say more in a minute, also of course helps safeguard nature. But because we recognise there will always be cases where development must occur on greenfield sites, our new biodiversity net gain tariff will ensure that any loss of habitat is more than made up for by developer investment in new or recovered landscapes, which will be homes for wildlife restoration.

Our new Framework also strengthens the protections afforded to neighbourhood plans, even where local planning authorities have failed to put their own plans in place, and it respects the special circumstances of island communities and recognises the importance of prime agricultural land.

There are many other updates in the Framework we are publishing today that will also bolster supply, of course – including the greater promotion of small sites for self and custom-build homes, and increased flexibility for upward extensions in the form of mansard roofs. Throughout, we have striven for the balance that facilitates desirable development, constrained by appropriate protections. And that is a balance I am confident we have struck.

These changes – taken together – ensure that new homes will be more beautiful, they deliver more new infrastructure, they strengthen democratic involvement in the planning system, they enhance the built and natural environment, and enable us to both protect the character of existing neighbourhoods and build attractive new neighbourhoods.

And because we have listened to thoughtful and measured concerns about how the planning system has worked, and made sensitive, practical, improvements, there is now no excuse for any local authority not to have a plan in place, no excuse not to ensure that homes are delivered swiftly and efficiently through that plan, and no excuse for leaving communities – and the next generation – without the homes they need.

[Political content removed] We have listened to the concerns of communities, [political content removed] about new development. We're doubling down on making it easier to build homes on brownfield sites where people want to live., And we are taking on the vested interests and slow actors in the planning process, [political content removed].

[Political content removed]

And we will now be just as rigorous and robust in rooting out the delays, blockages and bad practice in our planning system as ever.

HOW TO DELIVER THE FUTURE

I will make sure that every local authority is held to account for delivery against its plan, for the speed with which planning applications are processed and also the rationality of their decision-making.

At the Department for Education I saw that nothing so concentrated the mind of system-leaders as sharper accountability. Rigorous inspection. Robust league tables. I will apply the same principles and approach to the performance of local planning authorities.

We will publish league tables revealing the real performance of local planning authorities. The speed with which they respond, the level of approvals, their delivery against targets. We will ensure that these league tables reflect how the system is gamed at the moment by some. Some authorities use so-called Extension of Time Agreements – that is to say an insistence on delays – to slow down the system. Developers have little option but to agree to such delays or face the frustration of their plans altogether.

Strip these agreements out of the system, and in the two years to September, only 9% of local authorities determined 70% or more of non-major applications within the statutory eight-week period.

On major applications it is even worse: strip out the Extension of Time Agreements and only 1% of local authorities managed to get through at least 60% of

planning applications within the statutory 13-week period.

By revealing how many planning applications are actually processed within the proper time limit, and how many simply appear to be because of the use of these Extension of Time agreements, we will more clearly identify the good planning authorities and those who are hiding behind these agreements to mask their dilatoriness.

Because I am so concerned by the ballooning use of these agreements – and the delay that they cause in particular for non-major applications, where their use has jumped more than four fold in under a decade – I will take action now.

I intend to constrain their use, including banning them for householder applications, limiting when in the process they can apply, and prohibiting repeat Extension of Time agreements. And these are all measures on which we will consult shortly.

By using league tables to more rigorously identify those who are strong performers, who resist the use of these agreements, we can also more easily identify the good practice that they exemplify in other ways and spread it across the system.

And we know at the heart of good practice is respect for the professional judgement of planners. Their role is critical in local government but their expertise is often undervalued by some local authorities. The respect which should be accorded to their thoughtful decision-making is, not always apparent.

There are too many instances where planning committees overturn their planners' recommendation for approval of new development even when the proposal is entirely in line with the local plan and its policies. When that happens the developer, understandably, appeals the judgement and, almost invariably wins. The local authority will end up paying costs – diverting council tax money away from vital services. And the new homes that we need will have been delayed – impoverishing everyone.

So we will lay out the details of which local authorities are most promiscuously rejecting planning applications against officers' advice. And we will make transparent the amount that it is costing the local council taxpayer. Local authorities like [political content removed] Waverley have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds of local people's money defending their decisions to reject appropriate development. And the cases they lose again and again are money down the drain for local people and such behaviour needs to be called out.

So – local authorities must have a plan in place, must deliver against it, and must demonstrate fast and effective performance.

And central Government is providing the resource to make the system work better. The significant extra funding for local authority planning services announced at the Autumn Statement is coming through. The Planning Skills Delivery Fund was boosted by £5 million to £29 million – and I am delighted today to award the first round of funding: 180 local planning authorities receiving collectively over £14 million.

New planning fees also came into force a fortnight ago bringing extra resource into local planning services – increasing for major applications by 35% and minor ones by 25%. The indexing arrangement now in place also ensures that they rise in line with inflation.

And I want to be clear that these fees must be spent on planning services – that is a hard requirement on local authorities. While the Government does not constrain how local authorities use their general fund, some of which is usually allocated to planning, I expect every local authority's spending on planning services to rise as a result of this fee increase.

At the same time, the Planning Inspectorate, under the leadership of Paul Morrison and Trudi Elliott, is strengthening its operations and I am holding it to higher standards.

There is additional help too coming from the team at the Office for Place, now fully up and running in

Stoke-on-Trent under its interim chair Nicholas Boys-Smith. The Office for Place will produce elements of design codes and evidence-based exemplar pattern books that councils can download and adapt, further streamlining and speeding up quality development.

We are also standing up our 'supersquad' members – the new team of leading planners and specialists whose talents will be used across the system to unblock major housing developments: £13.5 million has been announced to support their work.

And also at the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor also allocated £5 million to support the Local Development Order – an underused weapon in the planning armoury. These are powerful ways to cut red tape and grant planning permission upfront. Somerset Council is using a Local Development Order to transform a brownfield site off the M5, the former Royal Ordnance Factory, into a new Enterprise Zone – creating up to 1.1 million square meters of advanced manufacturing and smart campus space.

We want to see more local authorities embracing what Somerset have done. But I recognise that for many authorities, using a novel tool – with the prospect of a loss of fee income – can be daunting.

So we are going to use this £5 million to support a number of authorities with strong proposals in the pipeline to get LDOs in place – and if successful, we hope to expand this kind of support more widely.

So there is support from my department and the Treasury with additional cash, expertise and greater flexibility in the use of planning tools.

But I know the majority of local planning authorities will use this additional support to deliver a better system and to accelerate development. But where there is, and has been, consistent under-performance – I will act.

So today I am taking steps to deal with under-performers in the planning system. And there is no

greater failure than the failure to actually have a plan in place. That is why today I am issuing a direction to seven of the worst authorities in terms of plan-making who have failed not just to adopt a plan but even to submit one to examination since 2004. St Albans, Amber Valley, Ashfield, Medway, Uttlesford, Basildon, and Castle Point will all need to provide me with a plan timetable within 12 weeks. Should they fail, I will consider further intervention to ensure that a plan is put in place.

And I am prepared to act wherever there is failure. I expect all other authorities to make sure that they have timetable for an up-to-date plan in place within the same timeframe, with a copy provided to my Department.

I am also acting today to deal with more planning authorities that have persistently under-performed in dealing with planning applications. I have already used the designation framework to step in where necessary to root out torpor: requiring an authority to produce an improvement plan and allowing developers to apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate for a decision.

Today I am designating another two District Councils for poor quality decision making – Chorley and Fareham. I will be reviewing the current criteria and thresholds for designations, to make sure we are not letting off the hook authorities that should be doing better. And we are also publishing the full results of the 2022 Housing Delivery Test, and that will see 20 local authorities become subject to the presumption in favour of sustainable development as a consequence of their poor housing delivery.

But I recognise that performance is not just a concern in local authorities. I am also worried about delay and procrastination with statutory consultees. Now, statutory consultees are an important check and balance within our planning system.

Safeguarding the environment, respecting heritage, ensuring health and safety considerations are properly taken into account. All matter to me. But the performance of Natural England, the

Environment Agency, Historic England, and other arm's length bodies needs to improve.

A superficial glance at the statistics suggest that most statutory consultees respond within the expected 21-day limit. But look a little closer and you can observe the regular use of holding responses – effectively, an ‘I’ll get back to you later’ acknowledgement. It meets the headline target for a response, but it disguises foot-dragging and delays development.

The wider public interest is poorly-served by this.

We are helping statutory consultees to do better. Thanks to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA), we are already acting to allow statutory consultees to charge for pre-application advice, which will have the twin benefit of tackling problems upstream for developers and reducing the flow of downstream requests from local authorities. And I am clear that I expect both local authorities seeking advice, and the consultees providing it, to be judicious and pragmatic in their approach – because too much caution serves no one’s interests.

But more is needed. So today I am asking Sam Richards to lead a rapid, three-month review into the wider statutory consultee system. Sam is an energy specialist and a green hero – he understands the need to protect the natural world – but with his experience of government at the highest level he will ensure that unnecessary delay everywhere is tackled comprehensively.

Sam will look at whether the current group of consultees is right, whether the performance reporting is effective, and whether the absence of a reply within an appropriate timeline should be treated as a green light, rather than a red one.

Sam will report back to me and the Chancellor, and we will then seek to act on his recommendations in the new year.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE FUTURE

I have spoken a great deal this morning about the need for all of us to do better, for people and communities. In recognising this, I accept that His Majesty's Government must also raise its game – in particular in relation to infrastructure delivery.

My colleague Lee Rowley has been leading the work. His paper – 'Getting Britain Building Again – Speeding Up Infrastructure Delivery' – outlines what more we need to do.

The plan Lee has put together commits government to speed, certainty, simplicity, and a focus on delivery – and it sets out what that means in practice.

We are changing the planning process for national infrastructure, aiming to cut up to five months off the consenting process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, and we're building the capacity and capability of local authorities and arm's length bodies to deal with these problems.

We know also that having up to date National Policy Statements matters in facilitating delivery – and new National Policy Statements on energy and national networks will be in place before the end of this financial year, supplementing the National Policy Statement on water resources that was designated this September.

We are also streamlining and standardising the process for reviewing these policy statements.

We will be publishing spatial data on major infrastructure projects for the first time, helping those involved to better understand the impacts on local places, communities, and the environment.

And we're undertaking a three-month review that will look at whether more 24/7 working should be applied to large infrastructure projects in the UK, drawing on lessons from countries that have already taken this step such as Spain.

And we will look to tackle some of the uncertainty in the system that flows from judicial reviews, knowing that even unsuccessful challenges can delay a project for years. A scheme to improve the A428

and speed up journeys between Milton Keynes, Bedford, St Neots, and Cambridge has just been delayed for another year by judicial review.

And as we do all of this, we must continue to learn from the best thinkers outside government – such as Professor Bent Flyvbjerg, who has dedicated his career to researching how to plan and manage megaprojects – from Olympic Games to the development of cities.

CITIES FOR THE FUTURE

And cities is where, as I laid out in our long-term plan for housing, we must concentrate more of our new development.

As Edward Glaeser, the great urbanist and author of the *Triumph of the City*, has written, “Cities enable the collaboration that makes humanity shine most brightly”.

The agglomeration effect – the economic growth that comes when talent is concentrated – occurs most powerfully in cities. Efficient use of precious land for development happens most effectively in cities. Environmental protections are stronger when populations live in close proximity – in cities.

That is why we are using central Government’s convening power, and billions of pounds of public money, to supercharge development in our cities. Through programmes such as the Brownfield Infrastructure Land Fund and other resources allocated through Homes England we are delivering the biggest urban regeneration programme for decades.

We’re working in Wolverhampton, Blackpool, Sheffield, Birmingham, York, Manchester, Leeds, London, and Liverpool.

We will be saying more in January about the further steps we will take to drive forward urban regeneration nationwide to provide the homes we need in the places where people want to live and where we can best boost economic growth.

But today I want to briefly outline further steps we are taking in two critical locations to deliver growth.

First. London. Radical action is required in London, where the homes we need are simply not being built. In the last three years the average number of net additional dwellings provided by the Mayor has been just 38,000. That is 15,000 fewer homes every year than the Mayor's own target in his London Plan. Not only that but it was over 63,000 homes lower than actual need last year, as calculated by the standard method – the target-setting process by which we hold other local leaders to account.

This has a significant effect on the availability of homes for those who wish to live and work in the capital. London's house prices remain the most expensive in the UK – at an average of £537,000. On average, London has the lowest level of home ownership in the country, the highest number of renters and the greatest number of people in temporary accommodation – including over 80,000 children.

We are pumping billions of pounds of central Government money into building affordable homes in London but the Mayor's approach is frustrating delivery. I am strongly in favour of affordable and social housing. But the Mayor's requirement for such a high percentage of affordable homes in every new development imposes such significant costs that in many cases development doesn't go ahead at all.

And so we get no new homes – and no new affordable homes. London boroughs [political content removed] such as Westminster and Wandsworth are now only exacerbating this problem.

I said in July that I wanted to work with the Mayor to tackle this worsening crisis, and I still do. But in the many conversations that I and my officials have since had with developers, boroughs, consultants and other partners, it has become evident that changes to the London Plan itself are needed if our capital is to get the homes that its people need to flourish and thrive.

I have therefore asked Christopher Katkowski KC, Cllr James Jamieson, Paul Monaghan and Dr Wei Yang to review the London Plan, and identify where changes to policy could speed up the delivery of much needed homes in urban city sites in the heart of our Capital.

They will report to me early next year and I hope we can agree a plan for reform and delivery with the Mayor.

But if not, I reserve the right to intervene. If housing targets are to mean anything we cannot have failure to meet them in such a terrible way persist [political content removed].

London is not the only city where we are taking steps to build many more homes.

Again, In July, I outlined our vision for Cambridge 2040. A new urban quarter – one truly plugged into the existing city rather than simply orbiting it – with beautiful Neo-classical buildings, rich parkland, concert halls and museums providing new homes for thousands each year. And further, ambitious, development around and in the city to liberate its potential with tens of thousands of new homes.

Nowhere is the future being shaped more decisively than in Cambridge. Its global leadership in life sciences and tech is a huge national asset. But until now, as I've pointed out, its growth has been constrained. Lab space and homes for the scientists, technicians and support staff who power innovation have not been provided in the numbers, at the scale, or with the pace required.

That is why I appointed Peter Freeman as the Chair of the Cambridge Delivery Group in July and since then he has been working flat out to deliver our vision for the city, in collaboration with local leaders and representatives.

Delivering our vision means laying groundwork for the long-term, and that starts now.

We will establish a new development corporation, with a broadly based Board to steer its efforts. These we will arm with the right leadership and full

range of powers necessary to marshal this huge project over the next two decades, regardless of the shifting sands of Westminster.

We recognise that the scale of development we are talking about will require upfront investment, that is commensurate with our level of ambition, across both the public and private sector.

And we must also ensure we have an approach towards water that reflects the nature of Cambridge's geography. That is why we are announcing today new steps to help manage demand for water in new developments and we will say more about new sources of water supply in the new year.

Because our vision for Cambridge is going to exemplify what it means to fall back in love with the future. It is going to set the standard for how we protect and preserve what makes a city special and also how we design and equip it for the century ahead.

CONCLUSION

I began by recalling how much we can learn from the Victorians – and their spirit of endeavour and ambition, their belief in progress and their restless quest to innovate and improve.

I believe we can not just match – but outdo – that embrace of the future. My approach to the way in which we need to find space to develop and grow in this nation is, in Tennyson's words – to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.

And it is in that spirit I want us all this Christmas to fall back in love with the future.

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Explore the topic

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