Departments must join forces to deliver on government flood risk promises, Localis report urges

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Press release

Departments must join forces to deliver on government flood risk promises, Localis report urges

Environment and housing ministers must work together to enact promises made in opposition to improve flood defences and boost planning resilience, a new report from think-tank Localis has urged.

In a report published today entitled **'Plain Dealing Revisited– planning for flood resilience'** the independent place experts set out how in the three years since their original 'Plain Dealing' report, sustained housing demand and pressure on local authorities has led to a continuation of development in floodplain areas.

In original research undertaken for their latest report, Localis examined the public planning portals of the 12 English council areas with the highest percentage of properties at risk of flooding during the first half of 2024, finding **7,116 new dwellings** in the planning pipeline.

Of these, **1,006 were new permissions**[1] for 2024, with the remainder being approvals from previous years continuing to progress through the planning system. In addition, in these high-risk flood areas, some **2,389** new dwellings were granted planning permission on land previously developed or resulting from change-of-use applications, **of which 280** were new applications granted this year.

Data collected by Localis in 2021 for the previous Plain Dealing report shows that the same councils granted **1,104** new homes to be built on floodplain land in the first six months of that year. Currently there are no laws against the granting of planning permission for and construction of homes in areas at high risk of flooding, and the Environment Agency compiled 267 instances of homes granted planning permission against their advice on flood risk in the year 2022-23 alone.

Among its key recommendations, Localis calls for new environment secretary Steve Reed to empower the recently established Flood Resilience Taskforce with a remit to not just provide new defences but also review existing schemes and how resilience measures are implemented in the planning system.

The think tank also calls for an urgent uplift in the Environment Agency's capacity to ensure the maintenance of flood defence assets and to enforce planning regulations.

Localis also recommends that housing secretary Angela Rayner use the Planning and Infrastructure Bill and the revised National Planning Policy Framework to consolidate and reinforce planning resilience measures.

Localis chief executive, Jonathan Werran, said: "Twin government objectives of delivering up to 370,000 new homes a year and enhancing our resilience against flood risk are not of themselves incompatible missions, but will require tightening up and harmonising of policy levers.

"This need for a renewed urgency for joined-up government is especially the case as our research indicates a continuation of planning permissions being granted for new dwellings in areas of such high flood risk."

Sandy Forsyth, Localis lead clean growth researcher,
said**:** "As long as new planning consents are being given to homes in flood zones on undeveloped land, people and communities will continue to see compounding risks.

"The time is now for the rules to change, as government sets out to rejuvenate the planning system and plans for a newly invigorated era of housebuilding, so that the built environment can be resilient to current and future environmental hazards."

Caroline Johnson, claims director of personal lines insurance at Allianz UK, said: "It is concerning to see so many homes being given planning permission in these areas. Floods are traumatic events for householders, who can see their homes ruined and a lifetime's worth of possessions destroyed.

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“The Government has announced ambitious plans to build 1.5m homes over the course of this Parliament, and while we know more new homes are necessary, it is important that they are resilient to floods and bad weather

“Our changing climate means that floods and severe weather are likely to become more common. It is important for national and local planners and developers to work together to prevent unnecessary development in high-risk flood areas and ensure that new homes are more resilient to floods.”

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Notes to Editors:

1. **An advance copy of the report is available for download**

1. **About Localis**

Localis is an independent think-tank dedicated to issues related to politics, public service reform and localism. We carry out innovative research, hold events and facilitate an ever-growing network of members to stimulate and challenge the current orthodoxy of the governance of the UK.

www.localis.org.uk

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* Including non-consolidated entities with Allianz customers.

**As of June 30, 2024.

1. **Key report recommendations**

Recommendations

1. The **Flood Resilience Taskforce** should be given an expanded remit to examine the current state of existing flood defences, improve public information and review how effectively resilience measures are implemented in the planning system.

    1. The **Minister for Water and Flooding**, currently located within Defra, should be given a joint brief covering Defra and MHCLG, with the responsibility of overseeing the taskforce and implementing its recommendations.

    2. **The Environment Agency must have its capacity greatly improved:** to ensure the maintenance of flood defence assets, both public and privately held, and to enforce regulations in planning. The Taskforce should be given a remit to examine how this can

be achieved.

3. The Taskforce must work to **improve the availability and accessibility** of data on floodplain development – current transparency measures around planning decisions are not sufficient for understanding aggregate flood-risk across development.

4. To help combat poor awareness of flood risk, the Taskforce should work to **develop a live system providing responsive flood-risk category certification for new buildings** to increase risk awareness among homeowners and occupiers.

The **Planning and Infrastructure Bill** as well as the **revised National Planning Policy Framework** present an opportunity to consolidate and reinforce planning resilience measures.

1. While it currently exists as a guideline in the NPPF, the **sequential test for floodplain development must be made law**, to ensure that new development takes place in the most strategically appropriate places for national flood resilience.
2. To ensure that an area's aggregate flood risk is being considered, **lead local authorities should be consulted by law on all developments of more than two dwellings on floodplain land**, and total permissions of all sizes should be periodically reviewed.
3. In the context of greater green belt urbanization, surface water drainage requires specific consideration in the National Planning Policy Framework.
4. The **Flood Risk Assessment process should be reviewed,** ensuring that assessments are fully inclusive of not only dwellings and businesses, but also the surrounding environment and infrastructure, as well as emergency response.

Planning permissions

In *Plain Dealing*, Localis observed where new, floodplain development was occurring in the twelve local planning authorities with more than ten percent of properties already at a greater than 1 percent risk of flooding, as recorded in 2020.

For the purposes of this report, we have revisited these authorities to assess the ongoing pattern of development in areas at an existing high risk of flooding.

In the first half of 2024, **7,116** new dwellings were granted full or conditional approval on planning permissions along the planning pipeline on previously undeveloped floodplain land in the 12 local authorities studied. **1,006** of those permissions were entirely new permissions of either full, outline or reserved matters applications. Additionally, **2,389** new dwellings were granted planning permission on previously developed land or as a result of change-of-use applications, and **276** of those were new applications this year.

Developments on previously undeveloped land

Developments on previously developed land

Boston

Lancaster

East Lindsey

[illegible]	Exeter	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Rutland	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Kingston upon Hull	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	North Lincolnshire	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Runnymede	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	South Holland	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Spelthorne	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	Windsor and Maidenhead	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

[1] Including full, outline and reserved matters applications

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Additional Assets:
Localis report "Plain Dealing Revisited - planning for flood resilience"

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