Plan homes for climate change driven flood risk, Localis report urges Government

Monday 22 November, 2021

Press release

Embargo date: from 00.01 a.m., Monday 22nd November 2021

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Housing secretary Michael Gove should reset planning policy to ban developers from building thousands of new homes in high-risk flood areas, the think-tank Localis has argued.

In a report published today entitled **'Plain Dealing – building for flood resilience '** the place experts set out how deepening climate change pressures and rising housing demand have resulted in an increase in flooding on properties in at risk areas.

In original research undertaken for the report, Localis discovered that almost 200 planning permissions have been granted on floodplain land so far this year for soe 5,283 new homes in the highest-risk local authorities in the country, the overwhelming majority some 4,255 in areas pre-identified as highly likely to flood.

Among its key recommendations, Localis calls for government commitment to empowering communities to manage flood risk locally in a 'resilient' way that allows them to pursue their local ecological, economic and social goals. In this context resilience means flood strategies that focus on living with floods instead of just preventing them and involve a flexible approach to flooding and a rapid recovery from inundation.

Other report recommendations for policy and regulatory changes include suggestions to: -

- Make developers liable for the sustainability and insurability of any new developments built in floodplain areas.
- Support effective collaboration between the public, private and civil society with the aim of reinvigorating and re-incentivising flood insurance schemes and partnerships – for example comprehensive risk management in at risk urban regeneration zones.

Localis chief executive, Jonathan Werran,
said: "There is a clear need to reset government policy and regulation to prevent an otherwise unavoidable 50% uptick in the numbers of houses being built on floodplains over the next half century.

"At the same time, with climate change another unavoidable reality, we need to strengthen communities to become resilient in adapting to, living with and responding to flood pressures."

Grace Newcombe, Localis lead clean growth researcher, said**:** "We know that climate change is intensifying, flooding is increasing, and housing pressures are rising. Floodplain development necessarily sits at the intersection of these demands but it must not come at the expense of individual and community safety.

"Clearly defined flood resilience objectives from the national Government aligned with whole-system collaboration is needed to protect homes and businesses and stimulate building back better. Failing to do this and continuing to build new homes in floodplain areas without resilience measures is a planned catastrophe."

Martin Milliner, Claims Director at LV= General Insurance said: "Climate change will increase the UK's exposure to weather-related hazards such as flooding, and it's vital we prepare for this. Whilst we welcome the Government's commitment to increase housing we have concerns about the UK's resilience to future flood events, and in particular the number of new housing developments in flood risk areas that are still receiving approval. With those involved in the planning process ignoring the current guidance, this runs the risk of putting an ever-increasing number of communities at risk.

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“Flooding is an extremely traumatic event which has a devasting impact on a person’s life, both physically and mentally. This research highlights a concerning amount of current and future development in high flood risk areas.

“To tackle this, we need to come together and develop a holistic approach to flooding for the long term, with property developers, insurers and Government – both nationally and locally – tackling the issue of building on floodplains.”

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Notes to Editors:

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

https://www.localis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/042_Floodplains_WebAWK.pdf

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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1. **Key report recommendations**

- **Planning reforms**

– Floodplain development should be avoided wherever possible and should be accompanied by appropriate flood defences, constructed alongside new developments, where unavoidable.

– Local authorities with planning teams should appoint a chief resilience offer who is: -

o Required to sit on local resilience forums.

o To become a single point of contact for English local government districts on the issue in county/district areas, or in unitary authorities depending on governance systems.

• Funding recommendations

– Specific funding should be made available to establish a new cross-departmental task force to look at flood-risk development. A new ministerial post, between Defra and DLUHC, should be set up to oversee and provide accountability for this task force.

o This would include provision for: –

– engagement with, and capacity training for, local authority planning teams (particularly chief resilience officers);

– design and funding of graduate schemes for flood resilience professionals in planning, water management and other key disciplines;

– serving as a single point of contact for central government on the issue.

– Money must be made available for upgrading maintaining flood defences (overseen by task force)

o a blended mix of revenue allocation via the Environment Agency to local authorities and to internal drainage boards, to undertake essential work on existing flood defences going forward. This may well involve a period of just a few years where we frontload a significant amount of public money to bring our assets up to a condition that is easier to manage than on a ‘little and often’ basis.

• A future risk-based approach to development

– The insurance industry should work with the government, local authorities developers and other key stakeholders to help inform what measures might be needed in the future to help mitigate against climate change and ensure that homes are and remain insurable.

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