

Coronavirus and Government Initiatives



Well, we certainly didn't see that coming! The Covid-19 virus has swept across the world in a matter of weeks and most of us are now living in a reality that would have seemed more the preserve of a science fiction-orientated dystopian future only a short time ago. Population lockdown, social control, climbing death rates, health systems in crisis, and the prospect of economic recession make most journals and technical commentary defunct and a little small; however, many are trying to maintain a semblance of normality and are even preparing for the new post Covid-19 that we will, in due course, emerge into.

RICS has been trying to support members, and staff, during this period in numerous ways. We have made all of our conferences, CPD, webinars and online training free to access and use for all RICS members. More details can be found on our [training and events](#) page. RICS has also produced continuously updated Covid 19 information [COVID-19 webpages](#) and if there is an issue we have not addressed in our guidance, please let us know by emailing covid19@rics.org

Supporting your well-being

Whilst you are all working hard to maintain operations, I know that it will be a testing time and that extra support for our well-being can often go a long way. [Lionheart](#), an independent charity for RICS professionals can offer free and confidential advice, financial support, professional counselling and legal advice. They are available to support RICS members as well as APC candidates globally, so do make use of this service.

Most of our RICS standards and professional guidance production is in abeyance, with the Imagery 6th edition Guideline Note due to go into consultation in late summer 2020, GNSS 4th edition starts its review in autumn 2020 and the Boundaries 4th edition Guideline Note aims for consultation in autumn 2020. Covid-19 permitting, we still have one eye on the annual neighbour disputes roadshow in November/December 2020.

Covid-19 swept away all geospatial-orientated events this spring, with high profile cancellations such as the World Bank Land conference, UNGGIM/Cambridge Conference 2020 and FIG Amsterdam. Closer to home, [GeoBusiness 2020](#) has been postponed until late September and has moved venue to Excel, London. The global Geospatial profession has been particularly adept at providing a plethora of online and free-to-access webinars and conferences during this period.

Class of your own – many of you will follow the wonderful Alison Watson on the 'socials' and will also have read about the launch of the new DEC survey school in the latest CICES CES journal – more details on how to get involved and help @ www.designengineerconstruct.com.

Government policy on geospatial

There have been several important UK geospatial policy announcements during spring.

The government has announced a new 10-year [Public Sector Geospatial Agreement](#) with Ordnance Survey. Geospatial data underpins Britain's public services such as emergency planning, building our homes, protecting our environment, supporting our transport and helping our security services to keep us safe. The Geospatial Commission has announced it is increasing the location data available to the public sector across England and Wales. Any public sector organisations ranging from health and emergency services, town, parish, and community councils through to central government departments can sign up via [Ordnance Survey](#) to use the data, free at the point of use. Known as the Public Sector Geospatial Agreement, it will be delivered by the national mapping agency, Ordnance Survey and will start from 1 April 2020.

The Geospatial Commission has brought together a collection of fifty housing, land and planning open datasets to make data easier to find for the sector, [see here](#). This is an incredible online resource of datasets and really puts geospatial information at the heart of helping to fulfil the UK's chronic housing shortage.

The Homes England Land Hub lists the sites available for development or disposal by [Homes England](#). Of course, land availability is one of the most crucial elements of house building and this new Land Hub helps developers find appropriate sites.

In the Spring budget, apart from the enormous [Covid-19 stimulus package](#) announced by the new Chancellor Rishi Sunak, there were also several other geo and land elements that caught the eye,

2.97 HM Land Registry (HMLR) – HMLR will be provided with £392 million to transition from a Trading Fund into part of central government. This funding includes £350 million that will be offset by HMLR returning its income to the Exchequer, and £42 million of funding to allow HMLR to continue with its ongoing project to digitise land registration in England and Wales, and enable further innovation in the property market and the wider UK economy.

2.212 Non-UK resident Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT) surcharge – The government will introduce a 2% SDLT surcharge on non-UK residents purchasing residential property in England and Northern Ireland from 1 April 2021. This will help to control house price inflation and to support UK residents to get onto and move up the housing ladder. The money raised from the surcharge will be used to help address rough sleeping. (47)

From the connected policy paper '[Planning for the future](#)', the government will ensure that land for housing is built out: "We will act to make it clearer who owns land by requiring greater transparency on land options. We will explore wider options to encourage planning permissions to be built out more quickly."

There is also the possibility of a land tax in the announcement on [business rates and taxation](#).

As already mentioned, I want to underline that RICS is here for its members during the Covid-19 crisis and we are working with our geospatial colleagues in kindred organisations such as CLGE, FIG, AGI, TSA, CICES and agencies such as OS, HMLR and the Geospatial Commission on making sure that our geospatial industries emerge stronger and are at the heart of the accelerated digital transformation of society. If you have any comments, do contact me @ jkavanagh@rics.org.

<https://www.gim-international.com/content/article/coronavirus-and-government-initiatives>
