



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister and First Lord of HM Treasury
Prime Minister's Office
10 Downing Street
London SW1A 2AA

20 March 2020

Dear Prime Minister

Support required by the construction and infrastructure sectors

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) represent a combined membership of over 130,000 skilled professionals. We develop, maintain and export professional services and standards, as well as accredit university courses across the globe. Together, our members make a vital contribution to the global success of the UK's built environment, and we are writing to you in order to both offer our help in this time of national emergency and seek Government support for the UK's construction and infrastructure sectors which are worth over £100 billion to the UK economy.

Our offer of help

We stand ready to support the Government in this time of national emergency and are willing to work with you to make a difference. Our professionals and firms work across the built environment sector and have access to a wide range of buildings whether in the hospitality or residential space that could be utilised by the NHS or other key workers, or information and resource hubs that can support the dissemination of information across our sector. We would be keen to meet with your senior officials to discuss in detail how we could make a difference here and ensure vacant beds are put to good use.

Supporting our sector

We also need more support from Government for the sector.

One of the biggest threats to the continuity of construction sector activity is the closure of construction sites, and this will undoubtedly come under pressure as the pandemic evolves and inspection regimes falter. We will monitor how this will impact our members, and the industry as a whole, and relay our insights to you.

However, the Government can provide assurances to the sector by ensuring that long overdue legislation, such as the Fire Safety Bill (published this week) and the forthcoming Building Safety Bill (publication scheduled for the summer), are not interrupted.

Our members are also very concerned about the rapid cancellation of early stage projects which are at inception or early design stage, and site inspections. Our fear is that post-pandemic, this could cause committed projects to decline rapidly; elongating the recovery period.

For these reasons, we make the following calls for support from Government.

Support and Assistance for Built Environment Practices

- The Construction Leadership Council's call to defer VAT and PAYE payments should be extended to include corporation tax for a period of 12 months.
- The UK Government should introduce significant emergency loan funding; ensuring all planning and property services are eligible for the 'Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme' (CBLIS).
- This fiscal support should be able to contribute to a consultancy's ability to invest in technology to allow home working, full personal protective equipment (PPE), and the purchase of other technical aids such as drones.
- Support for lost wages of employees on reduced time or temporary layoffs, and staff who are temporarily made redundant.
- Requiring banks and landlords to offer all affected employees and businesses repayment holidays of up to 12 months on mortgages, loans, and rents. This includes commercial landlords, with Government guarantees if possible, and loan and mortgage terms which are approaching their end-date. This could adversely affect the ability to refinance, especially if redundancy or pension funds are depleted.
- Encouraging suppliers, such as utilities providers, to offer deferred payments terms to businesses.
- Establish a UK Govt underwritten business support fund to provide emergency cash flow via zero-interest loans and non-repayable grants.
- Delay introduction of any new business regulations, outwith the realm of forthcoming legislation, until impact of CV19 fully understood.
- Additional short- and medium-term funding to cover staff absences or redeployment to maintain operating capacity within planning departments;
- A temporary relaxation of time limits for planning applications to allow local authorities to prioritise cases to reflect health and safety considerations and the nature of requests;
- Waivers to allow the deferral of requirements for information if planning officers judge a request to be of low or no impact;
- Greater flexibility around the operation and submission of evidence to planning committees.

There has been sectoral discussions for the establishment of a UK Infrastructure Investment Bank to support the sector. Whilst it may be considered 'knee-jerk' reaction to establish this Bank in the immediacy, we believe it would be prudent of the Government to explore its benefits to support the sectors post-pandemic.

We would welcome any positive action to this letter from the Government; will continue to monitor activity in the UK's built environment; and inform you of market conditions to ensure the impact of these unprecedented times can be minimised.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Howell, RICS Managing Director, UK & Ireland
Victoria Hills, RTPI Chief Executive
Alan Valance, Chief Executive

cc:
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Nadhim Zahawi MP, Minister for Business and Industry
Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister of Scotland
Rt Hon Mark Drakeford AM, First Minister of Wales
Arleen Foster, First Minister of Northern Ireland
Michelle O'Neill MLA, Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland