

The Queen's Speech: Our Summary

13 May 2021

The
Heritage
Alliance

The Queen's Speech, delivered on 11 May, set out the Government's agenda for 2021. Key news for heritage centred around the Government's plans for '**levelling up**', the confirmed introduction of changes to the planning system through a new **Planning Bill** and announcements around the **Environment Bill**.

The speech also set out the Government's plans for the coming months alongside the nation's recovery from the pandemic and embracing "new opportunities for growth" following the UK's exit from the EU, which include the **Dissolution and Calling of Parliament Bill** (which will allow the Government to seek a fresh democratic mandate "when it is needed") and the establishment of a **Better Regulation Cabinet Committee**, chaired by the Chancellor, to facilitate regulatory reforms by the Government.

A focus is also set out to ensure that "the **public finances are returned to a sustainable path** once the economic recovery is secure", potentially signalling post-recovery financial cuts.

Key themes relating to **heritage** that were focussed on in the speech were as follows:

- Levelling Up
- Planning
- Environment
- Education and Skills
- Research and Development
- Health and Wellbeing
- Travel and Transport
- State Aid
- Charities & the Public Sector

We have produced a summary of the key points under sections for each of these key topics below.

The full detail can be read in the [library briefing](#), which was published to accompany the Queen's Speech. A recording of the speech can be found [here](#), along with a transcript [here](#).

Levelling Up

The Queen's Speech set out several announcements in line with the Government's Levelling Up agenda, which forms a central part of the Government's plans to 'build back better' from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This agenda is linked into the Government's wider goals around education and skills, health and wellbeing, building communities and local areas, "restoring pride in place". The Government also intends to create new jobs, boost training opportunities and grow productivity across the country, using a differentiated approach to recognise different levels of need.

- The Government will publish a [Levelling Up White Paper](#) later this year (date TBC), which will set out new policy interventions, aimed at improving livelihoods and opportunity across the UK.
- The **Health and Disability Green Paper** will be brought forward, which is aimed to continuously improve support offered to disabled people and lay the foundation for sustainable reform.

A confirmed package of UK-wide interventions to complement the Levelling Up agenda includes the following funds:

- The [Levelling Up Fund](#) - intended to invest in infrastructure that improves everyday life across the UK, including the regeneration of town centres and high streets, the upgrading of local transport and investment in cultural and heritage assets. Details of this fund are also set out in pages 44-45 of the briefing document.
- [The Community Renewal Fund](#) - intended to provide additional funding to help places across the UK prepare for the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- The [Future High Streets Fund](#)
- The [Towns Fund](#)

The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) will be launched in 2022, in place of EU Structural Funds, now that the UK has left the EU. The new Fund is "designed to increase funding for projects that are supporting people and places across the UK, focused on our domestic priorities, growing local economies, and breathing new life into our communities".

Planning

A **Planning Bill** has been confirmed, which will follow last summer's planning white paper. The Government's aim is to create a "simpler, faster and more modern planning system", with a focus on delivering housing and infrastructure more quickly across England.

The key points are as follows:

- The Government intends to change local plans to “**provide more certainty**” for **communities and developers over permissible development** and “what is permitted where”. The plan is for “clear land allocations in local plans” to “provide more certainty over the type, scale and design of development permitted on different categories of land”, as well as stronger rules on design.
- Controversial proposals for **zoning, which would see** planning permission accelerated for housing in “growth” areas may also be taken forward in the Bill.
- A new levy has been promised, to replace existing methods of securing developer contributions towards infrastructure and affordable housing with “simpler, faster procedures”. This **new developer contributions levy**, as stated in the white paper, is intended to replace the current system of section 106 agreements and the community infrastructure levy (CIL). The new threshold would be levied on the scheme’s completion, as opposed to being payable at the commencement of development, as the CIL is currently.
- Various **aspects of planning decision-making will be accelerated** through the new Bill, which aims to create faster procedures for producing local development plans and approving major schemes. However, there are [concerns](#) in the sector that these proposals would run counter to potential positive outcomes for communities in the proposed Environment Bill.
- The planning system will also be **digitised** and made “more visual” to facilitate public engagement with planning. This follows proposals from the white paper to introduce “map-based” and “interactive” local plans based on “data standards and digital principles”.
- Now that the UK has left the EU, the Government is planning to use “post-Brexit freedoms” to “**simplify and enhance**” the **framework for environmental assessments** for developments.
- The Environment Bill will mandate “**biodiversity net gain**” in the **planning system**. A duty will be introduced for developers to deliver an uplift in biodiversity through their schemes. According to the briefing document, the Bill is also promised to “improve planning for nature recovery through Local Nature Recovery Strategies and create Nature Recovery Networks to join up nature sites and create wildlife-rich places”. It is also intended to give communities a greater say in the protection of local trees.
- The Planning Bill will also bring a **change in the rules governing development corporations**. It is unclear what changes will be put in place, but this may see an increase in powers for “locally-led” development corporations, including those led by local authorities, to “support growth and regeneration” in local areas.

Further announcements related to planning in the Queen's Speech were:

- A **Building Safety Bill** will introduce a new system for regulating the safety of high-rise buildings and construction sites.
- A **Product Security and Telecommunications Bill** is intended to accelerate deployment of digital communications networks.
- A **Leasehold Reform (Ground Rent) Bill** will bring about measures to end the practice of ground rents for new leasehold properties.

Environment

The Queen's Speech confirmed that the [Environment Bill](#), which has been repeatedly delayed going through Parliament, is to be resumed. The Bill will include legislation to set out legally binding targets and the Government intends to support new green industries to create jobs, while protecting the environment.

The Environment Bill will introduce new rules for environmental protections now that the UK has left the EU. The Government will establish an independent Office for Environmental Protection, which will be set up in [a non-statutory \(interim\) form](#) from July.

Sector strategies and a comprehensive Net Zero Strategy are intended to help the UK meet its target of net zero emissions by 2050. The Government wants to "continue to lead the way globally in acting on climate change".

DEFRA has announced that new legal duties on water companies and government will also be included in the Environment Bill, with the aim being to reduce sewage discharged into waterways. Later this year, three new measures on storm overflows will be added by government amendment to the Environment Bill.

A **Dormant Assets Bill** is intended to provide an additional £880 million for social and environmental initiatives across the UK. The Bill will expand the Dormant Assets Scheme into the insurance and pensions, investment and wealth management, and securities sectors.

For **more information** about the Government's plans for the environment and their potential impacts on heritage, you can read [our briefing on the Environment Bill](#) (after its second reading, in which we point out its exclusion of heritage) and [our briefing on the 25-Year Environment Plan](#).

Education and Skills

The Queen's Speech included news of new legislation around skills and education. This includes measures that will be brought forward to **address lost learning** during the COVID-

19 pandemic “to ensure that every child has a high quality education and is able to fulfil their potential”.

The main announcement was around a **Skills and Post-16 Education Bill**, which will include legislation to support a [lifetime skills guarantee](#) to enable “flexible access to high quality education and training throughout people’s lives”. Traineeships and sector-based work academy programmes will be expanded to incentivise new apprenticeship hires, encouraging employers to identify and plan local skills needs and provide free courses to school and college leavers. The Bill will also introduce a new “flexible loan” system, which is designed to promote wider participation in further education in England. There is a focus on training in technical and professional skills, as well as facilitating retraining.

A **Professional Qualifications Bill** will create a new framework for the UK to recognise professional qualifications from across the world, which is intended to ensure that employers “can access professionals where there are UK shortages”.

The **Turing Scheme** will be introduced as a new international educational exchange scheme, with a global reach. This is intended to give young people across the UK, and especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, “the opportunity to work and study globally”.

A **Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill** will place new legal duties on students' unions and universities in England, which is intended to ensure free speech on campus.

Research and Development

The UK will be hosting the next G7 Summit. The Government has said that it is “committed to making the UK a global superpower” and “a global science superpower”, with a “**world leading**” **research and development** environment. We are to anticipate a swift increase in public funding for research.

The Queen’s Speech confirmed that work will be done to **deepen trade ties** in the Gulf, Africa and the Indo-Pacific.

Through the [Advanced Research and Invention Agency Bill](#), a new UK agency: the [Advanced Research and Invention Agency \(ARIA\)](#) will be established for scientific discoveries, established with funding for association to Horizon Europe.

Health and Wellbeing

A new **Health and Care Bill** is intended to bring more tailored and preventative care to patients “closer to home”. Measures will be brought forward to support people’s physical and mental health and wellbeing. Proposals on social care reform will also be brought forward.

Travel and Transport

In the Queen's Speech, it was announced that rail and bus networks will be reformed to "deliver a better, greener and more reliable service for passengers". This includes a **National Bus Strategy for England**, which is intended to deliver better bus services for passengers across England.

New powers to build and operate the next stage of the High Speed Rail line (HS2) will be established through a **High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill**.

State Aid

Measures will be introduced through the **Subsidy Control Bill** to ensure that "support for businesses reflects the UK's strategic interests and drives economic growth". Now that the UK has left the EU, the Government will introduce this Bill in place of the EU State Aid regime, providing a new legal framework within which public authorities make subsidy decisions.

One of the main benefits of the Bill is intended to be that it will enable public authorities "to **deliver subsidies that are tailored and bespoke for local needs** to support the UK's economic recovery and deliver Government priorities, such as increasing UK R&D investment and achieving net zero".

Charities and the Public Sector

Legislation will be introduced to "support the voluntary sector by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy". The **Charities Bill** will implement the "majority" of the recommendations in the Law Commission's 2017 report '[Technical Issues in Charity Law](#)'. The main benefit of the Bill is intended to be the removal of unnecessary administrative and financial burdens from charities, because of "inefficient and unduly complex law". Measures will be introduced to make charity regulation more effective and the legal framework easier to navigate, including simplifying the process for amending governing documents through the Charity Commission.

Under a section of the supporting document (page 15) on how the Government will "strengthen the Union and the constitution and continue to promote Global Britain", it is set out that the Government will "**stop public bodies from imposing their own approach or views** via boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns", which is intended "to ensure a coherent approach to foreign relations".

A new **Procurement Bill** will introduce laws intended to "simplify procurement in the public sector". The intention is to reform the UK's public procurement regime, which will replace the current regime (influenced by EU procurement directives). The Government also intends to make public procurement "more accessible for new entrants such as small businesses and voluntary, charitable and social enterprises to compete for and win public contracts." This Bill will be introduced from September.