



English local elections

May 2021

RICS manifesto

Introduction

This year's local elections are set against a backdrop like never before. Mayoral elections delayed from 2020 as a result of the national lockdown, councillors coming to the polls for the first time since the UK formally left the European Union, and all candidates and the parties behind them having to negotiate a whole new series of logistical challenges brought on by the need to campaign within the new parameters set through social distancing. And all those candidates, whatever position they are running for, will face a unique set of challenges as they work to help Britain build back better from this pandemic.

The role of the built environment, and those working within it, will be critical over the terms our elected representatives will serve. Chartered surveyors will play a pivotal role in tackling some of the most prominent domestic issues, including the lack of adequate housing, renewing our high streets, creating a 21st-century infrastructure network and addressing the challenges of climate change.

As we look towards a green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and to build back better, RICS professionals are uniquely placed to provide the leadership and expertise to guide decision makers forward.

Representing more than 80,000 UK professionals in the land, property and construction sectors, everything RICS does is designed to effect positive change in the built and natural environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges many of us have never witnessed before. Through the pandemic, we have all discovered a new appreciation for the important role homes and communities have on our lives. Businesses are also adapting to become more flexible and agile, and opportunities have arisen to refocus and prioritise the economic, political and social agenda.

We believe that our metropolitan mayors, combined authorities and councils of all shapes and sizes will play a decisive role in how well Britain responds to these challenges. They must work with Westminster to prioritise fiscal and political investment in the built environment if we are going to create safe, sustainable communities, fit for meeting both short-term and long-term challenges.

Building on our industry expertise, we believe our mayors and local authorities need to:

- create low-cost, low-carbon, safe homes across all tenures
- commit to retrofitting, repurposing and renewing of high streets to meet the challenges of a post-COVID, sustainably-focused environment
- embrace modern technologies in construction to create a housing and infrastructure system fit for future needs
- invest in training, devolvement and upskilling to create a world-leading workforce.

Through the challenges of recent years comes new opportunities. Decisions made by the next local leaders will have an impact on generations to come. We are now in a unique position where prioritising the built environment will integrate economic growth with social and environmental wellbeing. We call on all those up for election to embrace our recommendations and deliver meaningful change to our built and natural environments.

Simon Prichard

Chair RICS UK and Ireland Board

Christian Cubitt

Head of Government Relations UK and Ireland



Housing supply

Access to safe, green, affordable homes in places people want to live and work continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing local authorities across England. In some areas, particularly in London and the South East, this challenge is characterised by a lack of affordability, in other areas it's around the provision of high-quality homes. Prioritising the supply of both social and private housing stock, by extension, would deliver economic and social benefits across England.

In recent years, housebuilding has become more of an arbitrary target, rather than part of a wider placemaking strategy. It is now more important than ever that across England we not just build houses, but rather communities, with the social, economic, and physical infrastructure to sustain them.

We want to see an embrace of the smart housing building agenda, embedding modern methods of construction (MMC) into the process, creating homes for life and repurposing existing buildings to become suitable, high-quality homes.

There has been a focus in recent years on creating green new homes, which is welcome, but there has not been any significant plan to retrofit and decarbonise existing units across the country – which is a critical element towards achieving net-zero.

Increasing consumer confidence and motivation will be crucial for the next few years as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes motivating the market by reviewing the stamp duty and taxation system to encourage, not penalise, buyers. We are calling on the next generation of metropolitan mayors and councillors to support us in pressing government for a full and open review of all property taxation.



Residents also need to have the confidence that their home is safe. Tragic events in recent years have shown the importance of governments properly funding fire safety work and building quality standards. We want to work with councils up and down the country to ensure that all buildings are safe and secure for those that live, work and play in them.

We are calling on all elected mayors and local authorities to:

- **ensure any consumer housing guides they produce on buying/selling to reflect the new RICS Home Survey Standard, and encourage consumers to engage with surveyors to get condition-based surveys to protect homeowners**
- **prioritise fire safety by working with RICS and our professional to create safe homes and environments for people to live in**
- **commit to not imposing rent caps or significant rent controls that will likely increase disruption in the PRS and result in landlords leaving the market and a decrease in rental stock**
- **encourage and incentivise the market to adopt MMC by favouring its procurement for social housebuilding**
- **endorse the impartial RICS Low Carbon Home Consumer Guide to support and encourage homes to become sustainable regardless of tenure**
- **encourage and promote private-sector retrofitting**
- **support the RICS call for a full and thorough review of all property taxation to improve the market for buyers and sellers.**



High street renewal

High streets have, for as long as several decades, struggled to compete with the changing ways in which we shop, live, work and travel. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these problems, with many businesses reviewing their need for high street floor space, particularly offices, and the permanent loss of major retail and hospitality brands.

RICS welcomes the support that has been provided by central government for our town and city centres during the crisis, in particular the extension of the business rates holiday for those most severely impacted by the economic fallout of three national lockdowns. Similarly, the extension of the furlough scheme will help ensure that more jobs can be saved as businesses transition from lockdown to the new normal.

But this doesn't avoid the fact that high streets will look and feel very different on the other side of this pandemic. The challenge for all metropolitan mayors and local authorities across England will be how best to utilise the funding and the tools at their disposal in the planning system, to really build back better and create vibrant, thriving town and city centres.

Reform to business rates is needed to strengthen our high streets and create a system that works for both landlords and tenants, as well as reacting to changing economic circumstances and market conditions. The planning system also requires a significant overhaul, including the creation of a planning-led system, review of permitted development rights and reform to temporary and permanent change of use requests.

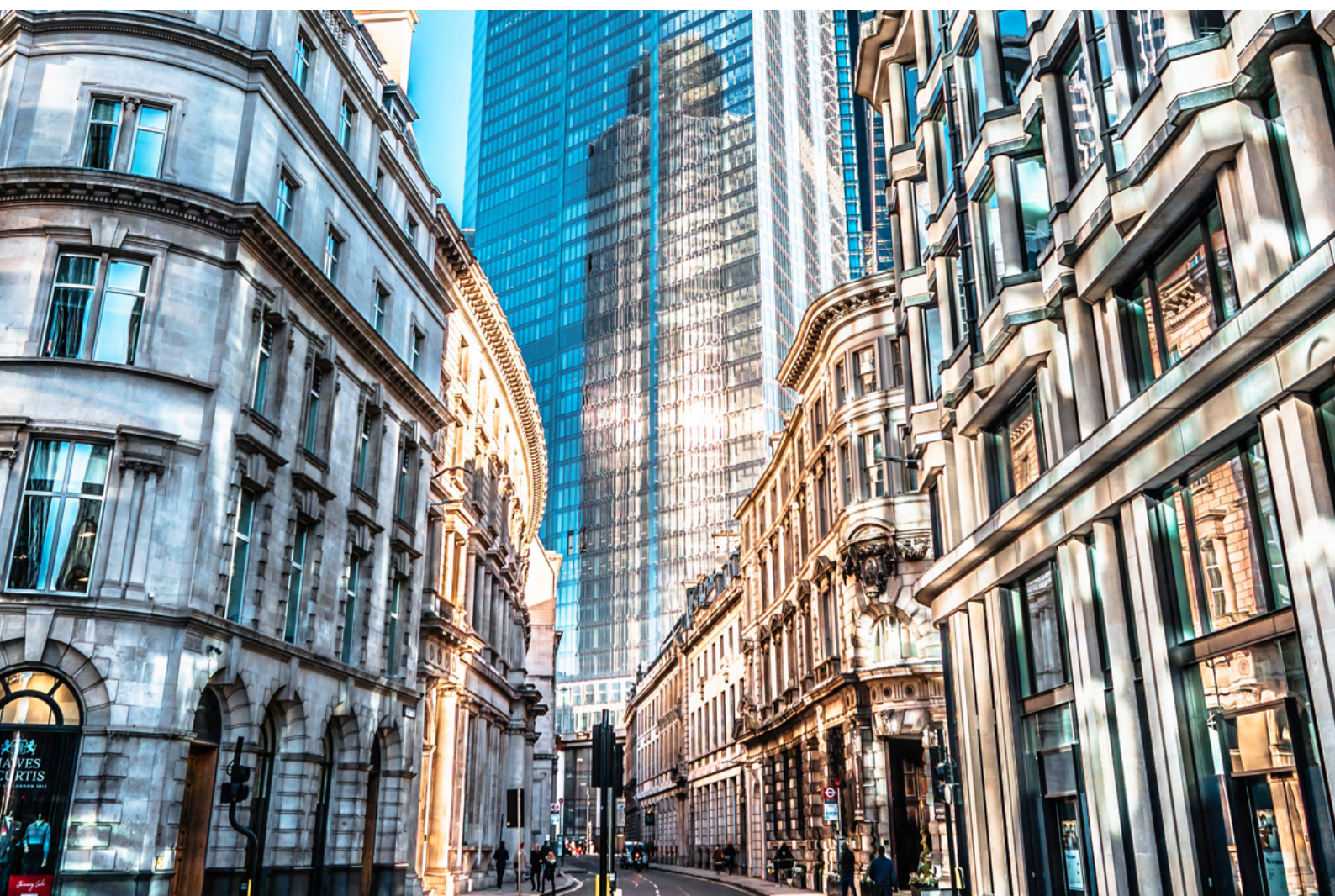
High street and town centres can lead the way in creating environmentally-friendly communities. After residential property, commercial property is one of the biggest contributors to energy waste and carbon emissions. Our authorities should undertake an ambitious green revolution to our high streets, incentivising and driving forward major building decarbonisation and retrofit programmes, improving transport infrastructure and creating green, pleasant environments.



There should be less reliance on pure retail and office-based high streets, and more input from local communities to deliver first-class offerings, including well-designed new housing, essential local services and in-demand leisure facilities. A collaborative placemaking strategy will be crucial for revitalising our high streets and initiatives such as the '20-minute neighbourhood' should be given consideration for any future development plans.

We are calling on all elected mayors and local authorities to do the following.

- **As a priority, support businesses facing commercial rent disputes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic by endorsing the use of the Commercial Rental Independent Evaluation Service, which was created to help landlords and tenants negotiate payments.**
- **Review change of use orders and consider options to simplify commercial-to-residential conversions through the planning system, while ensuring quality and safety is not compromised.**
- **Review the capacity and resources available to the planning system – often cited as some of the major challenges for planning authorities. The next government needs to work with the public sector to provide new core funding to boost local planning teams and increase the scope for greater contributions from developers and landowners. Any increase in funding will be linked to improved service levels.**



Construction and infrastructure

The construction sector is a significant contributor to our economy. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent economic impact, an overwhelming proportion of construction businesses identified infrastructure, particularly public-sector programmes, as key to the economic recovery in England.

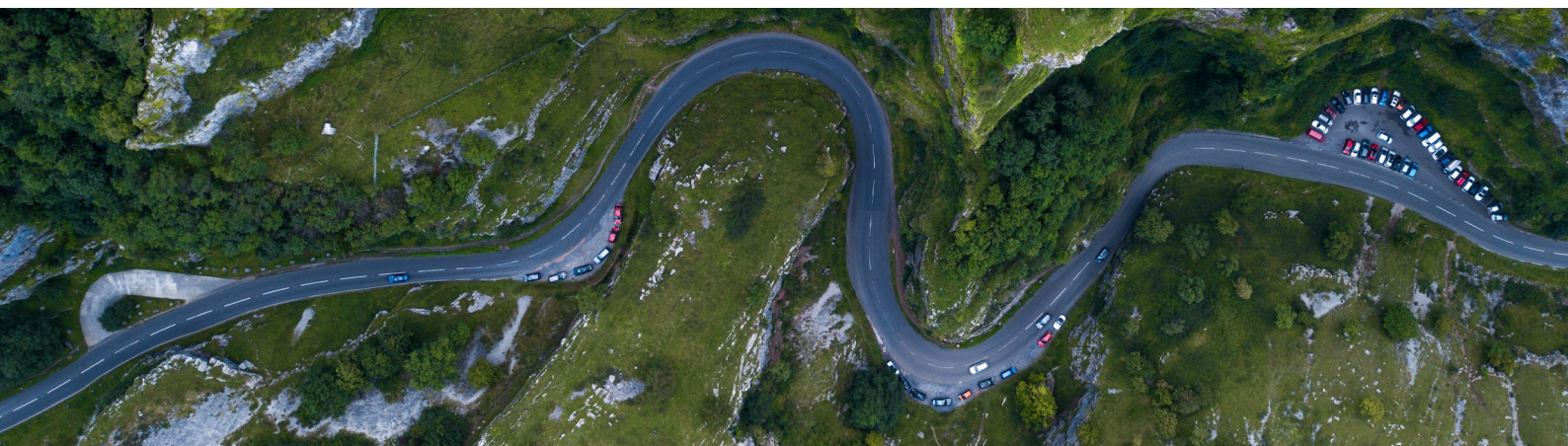
RICS is a major advocate of a green-recovery from COVID-19, putting economic, social and environmental sustainability at the heart of the policymaking process so we can come out of the pandemic stronger.

There are several major areas RICS is calling for reform and investment in, including procurement, taxation, training and connectivity – all of which will help create a construction industry fit for the future.

RICS worked in collaboration with industry partners to create the International Construction Measurement Standards (ICMS) – a globally recognised standard to increase transparency, reporting, accuracy and reduce waste in public-sector procurement for infrastructure schemes. Having already proven a valuable asset within public-sector infrastructure programmes at a national level in England, local authorities looking to deliver programmes in their areas should seek to adopt ICMS to improve the whole-life costings of major schemes and public spending.

Reform is needed to taxation in areas such as VAT, which favours the construction of new buildings rather than improving our existing building stock, resulting in a detrimental impact on our environment. RICS wants all authorities to support our calls for a temporary five-year reduction in VAT to 5% on all home retrofit work to incentivise a green revolution in building. This needs to be part of a wider programme of work where sustainability is placed at the heart of construction and infrastructure development.

The construction and infrastructure sector presents all our local authorities and metropolitan mayors with a real opportunity to make England a leading country for sustainable investment and development. The socio-economic impact of building back better and focusing on a green recovery will deliver tangible improvements to all our communities.



Our newly elected mayors and councillors should:

- **commit to improving accuracy, costings and transparency in public sector construction projects through the use of International Construction Measurement Standards 2 (ICMS 2) and to embed it in the public sector procurement processes to ensure accurate capital expenditure calculations, analysis of the cost-benefit, and whole-life costing**
- **support industry innovation and modernisation by strengthening the use of MMC in public infrastructure schemes**
- **support the RICS call for a temporary reduction in VAT on home improvements to incentivise more energy-efficient retrofit work in homes**
- **encourage private sector investment and a green-recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.**



Delivering confidence

We are RICS. Everything we do is designed to effect positive change in the built and natural environments. Through our respected global standards, leading professional progression and our trusted data and insight, we promote and enforce the highest professional standards in the development and management of land, real estate, construction and infrastructure. Our work with others provides a foundation for confident markets, pioneers better places to live and work and is a force for positive social impact.

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