

## All Change (Again) for the Planning System

Our newsletter in March mentioned the extensive reforms to the planning system proposed by the Conservatives before the election. Two months after the election, the implications of the change in government are coming to light. The Coalition Agreement and the Queen's Speech have both confirmed that regional planning in England is to be abolished. A major implication arising from this would be the removal of the housing targets which are imposed on local planning authorities by regional planning bodies.

Most recently, the new Communities Secretary has written to local authorities in England confirming that the abolition of regional planning will happen "rapidly" and this fact should be a "material consideration" in any decisions currently being taken by them. It also confirms that, under the new system, housing targets will be decided by the local authorities themselves, although no details have yet been published.

The letter has thrown the planning system into disarray, as it has been interpreted in a number of different ways. For example, the letter was viewed to have little impact by the Planning Inspector in the case of one Core Strategy in the South West, whereas two local authorities in the South East are delaying progress on their Core Strategies as a result of the letter.

Further complicating matters, in parallel to these changes last week the Government published updated national policy guidance, as it relates to housing. The changes:

- stop the assumption that previously developed land is necessarily suitable for housing development;
- remove national minimum housing densities for residential development; and
- redefine "previously developed land" to exclude "private residential gardens".

In combination with these changes, the removal of regional housing targets has the potential to provide considerable scope for local authorities to resist housing development, if they are so minded.

In conclusion, there are conflicting messages in the planning system at the moment, but there is every indication that securing residential development may become progressively more challenging as the government's plans start to be implemented, particularly in areas where local communities may not appreciate the benefits of development. It therefore might be appropriate to consider bringing residential proposals forward sooner rather than later, particularly if they rely on regional housing targets.

**We will continue to provide updates as details emerge. However, in the meantime, if you wish to discuss any of the implications of the change in government, or any other planning matter, please do not hesitate to call 0870 777 6292 or contact one of our nationwide specialists directly, as below:**

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