

Planning News

Localism Act Gets Royal Assent

On 15th November, the Localism Bill received Royal Assent and became an Act of Parliament. The majority of the measures are unlikely to be enacted until next April, although some, including the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies may come in advance of that. In part, the Act allows for a new tier of planning at the neighbourhood level, including the ability for groups to prepare Neighbourhood Plans, and grant permission for certain types of proposal without the need to formally apply. Whilst we anticipate that in some locations this will affect the way development is progressed, much will depend on the will and ability of local communities to take action. To view Rapleys full update on this news, visit: www.rapleys.co.uk/Upload/News/Localism_Bill.pdf

Cuts, Cuts and More Cuts

A recent Audit Commission report suggests that planning departments are facing cuts of up to 28% on average over the next four years, with some Councils likely to cut budgets by up to 50%. This cut, coupled with the requirements from the Localism Act to engage the public to a greater extent may result in less staff available to deal with applications, potentially leading to longer decisions and more frustration with the process. Equally, one can envisage fees both for pre application meetings and applications increasing as the budgets are readjusted. With certain authorities charging £3,000 for some meetings, this could become the norm.

The Debate Continues

The consultation period on the National Planning Policy Framework has now closed, but the furore continues as National Trust and others continue to make their point in the papers. The Government will now be 'considering their response' and are likely to amend at least a few key parts to appease the objectors. In addition, it is possible that the change of use from offices to residential will be enshrined in the policy document, rather than through amending legislation, allowing Local Councils to introduce the power or not as they see fit. This will result in a different approach in London, where the City of London are for example resisting the loss of offices, to other towns where a more relaxed approach will be taken. In the meantime, the ongoing marketing requirements of some Council's to support the redevelopment of offices will continue.

Housing Strategy Released

The Government's latest Housing Strategy was recently published, with the rhetoric that "The Strategy will break the cycle in which lenders won't lend, builders can't build and buyers can't buy". Much of the strategy is of a fiscal nature, with a 'Get Britain Building' fund for schemes which have planning permission, but which have been put on hold. Similarly, RSLs are to be awarded more funding, which the Government say will deliver up to 170,000 new affordable homes across the Country. We wait to see if the rhetoric can be realised.

And finally...

As a break from planning, Eric Pickles, the Communities Secretary is said to be starting a 'curry college' to train UK nationals to address the lack of skills as a result of immigration cuts from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Anyone fancy a takeout?

If you would like more information on any of the above, or for professional advice on any planning matters, please call 0870 777 6292 or contact one of our nationwide specialists directly, as below:

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