

# how to win under the present planning regime



The present paralysis in the world of planning and development can only be the consequence of a participant's lack of imagination, or maybe slothful energy levels. In the public sector, the following points will slowly be dawning on elected councillors:

- Despite last summer's Nimby parties and barbecues, the need for development has not been 'defeated'. The need for housing, jobs, infrastructure, and environmental improvements never went away, and is roaring back with a vengeance.
- There is no more guidance to come from central government. There is nothing to wait for, nothing to hide behind, no-one else to blame.
- Councillors are in charge, and do not have to wait to be told what to do by officers. Officers mostly don't know.
- If there is not an up-to-date Local Plan, any sensible planning application will have to be approved promptly (if a deal is wanted on planning gain), or else it will be won on appeal (with much less planning gain).
- There is no limit on what a council could do – in terms of shaping development, achieving infrastructure investment, stimulating economic development, and helping to ease housing shortages, poverty, bad health and poor educational achievement – if leading councillors have the wits to get on with it.

Meanwhile public officials lucky enough to remain in post will be learning that they have to be useful to their political masters if they are to survive. This does not mean box-ticking, or erecting (or imagining) obstacles, or hiding things from elected councillors under a smokescreen of expert knowledge of the 'system' of planning law and procedures. The rules are what councillors want them to be. A successful public official will be a wise adviser, a facilitator, a broker, an implementer, a critical friend, and will draw upon practical experience of development and political processes (if you haven't got any, watch out).

Those of us in the private sector are still a bit cluttered up by colleagues who complain about 'lack of certainty' (there never was much), the 'lack of strategic planning' (there wasn't much of that either), and 'lack of vision' (a postcard from Upton, Freiberg or Hammarby was never going to be enough, you know).

Happier are those who see in these times the sunlit uplands which invite fresh thinking, innovative ideas, new partnerships, liaisons and bargains to be struck; and new markets to create and new connections to make between what people need and the sources of political power and finance that can deliver. I hope I'm in this group, for I hold on to these truths:

- Planned development is a good thing for a civilised person to be engaged in. We are involved in a healthy, necessary and socially responsible endeavour.
- Good geography is always good geography in development terms. Planning policies were mostly long-winded ways of saying what is good geography.
- Demographic trends are all confirming the urgent need for wholesome durable (OK, if you must, 'sustainable') development.
- The things that make good places good, and bad places bad, have not changed.
- The conditions that make a good thing deliverable have not changed.
- Don't panic. This isn't the first government to toy with the idea, but control over the use of land is not going to be given up in the UK, by any political party.
- Observe where the nexus of control lies now, and bring forward irresistible proposals.

Those in the not-for-profit sector will be acutely aware that this is their time. The structural flaws in the capitalist system are now plain for all to see. Social enterprises are the only way out of the box for a whole range of issues. If you are dismayed at what you see, or at what you are expected to do in your work, go there.

Last, developers need to understand that their business models need radical change. The order is rapidly changing, as the great man said. The clever ones know it.

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