

Optimis Insight – Reforms to National Planning Policy

The Government’s Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill is currently being discussed in the House of Lords and will soon progress to the final stages of its consideration. The Bill has proposed a range of changes to the planning system aimed at streamlining the planning system, in particular the preparation of development plans. Whilst the Bill may enable local planning authorities to prepare plans with greater control, questions remain whether this will improve the delivery of homes and meet Government targets.

A recent report prepared by the House of Commons Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee considered the implications of the proposed reforms to national planning policy in more detail, concluding that the Government’s ‘stop-start reform’ over recent years has resulted in uncertainty across the planning sector. Further, with regard to housing supply, the report notes that it *“is difficult to see how the Government will achieve its 300,000 net national housing target by the mid-2020s if local targets are only advisory”* and insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate how this approach will lead to an increase in housebuilding.

Discussions with Mohammed Yasin MP

Justin Wickersham, Managing Director of Optimis Consulting, has met with Mohammed Yasin MP who sits on the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee. This provided an opportunity to discuss current changes proposed to the planning system and the outcomes of the report in more detail.

Clearly the Bill has introduced some controversial new themes but it is interesting to see the Committee, made up of cross-party MPs, is not wholly supportive of many of the themes outlined. The content and timing of the final Bill remains uncertain.

5-year Housing Land Supply Position Updates

The Local Planning Authorities in the surrounding area that are unable to or are close to demonstrating a 5-year housing land supply (5YHLS) are summarised below.

LPA	Supply
Central Bedfordshire Council	5.01 years (Aug 2023)*
St Albans City & District Council	2 years (April 2022)
Dacorum Borough Council	2.8 years (Jan 2023)*
Three Rivers District Council	1.9 years (Dec 2022)
Welwyn and Hatfield Borough Council	3.2 years (Jan 2023)
Hertsmere Borough Council	2.25 years (April 2022)
Buckinghamshire Council (Chiltern Area)	2.1 years (April 2022)
Buckinghamshire Council (South Bucks Area)	2.7 years (April 2022)

*By appeal

When a 5YHLS cannot be demonstrated, the tilted balance is engaged for the consideration of planning applications. This means that policies may be considered out of date and permission may have a greater prospect of being granted, except where policies pertaining to protected land provide a clear reason for not doing so.

Local Plan Updates

The below table identifies upcoming consultations on emerging Local Plans locally. This provides an opportunity for the promotion of sites, putting them forward to be considered by respective councils for delivering housing or employment development as part of the plan period through allocation. If you have land in one of these locations, please do get in touch to discuss the prospects of your land and whether it is suitable for promotion.

LPA	Notable dates
West Northamptonshire Council	Issues and Options Consultation (Reg 18) October 2023
Central Bedfordshire Council	Issues and Options Consultation (Reg 18) April 2024
Dacorum Borough Council	Draft Plan Consultation (Reg 19) June 2024
West Northamptonshire Council	Issues and Options Consultation (Reg 18) October 2023

Updates to Luton Borough Council Validation Process

Due to the level of invalid applications being processed by the council, Luton Borough has now put in place administration charges for dealing with invalid applications. For applicants, this means that where an application is found to be invalid, if matters are not resolved within the allocated time, their application will be withdrawn. A new submission can then be made that addresses all issues previously raised and a £200 admin fee for major applications will be payable to the council upon submission. The previously paid submission fee can then be transferred to the new application. It is therefore of increasing importance that submissions comprise information in line with the council’s Validation Checklist to avoid significant delays and additional fees.

Optimis will closely monitor Council websites for the publication of specific dates and keep clients informed. If you have any queries regarding the position of other local plans, please do not hesitate to contact us at enquiries@optimis-consulting.co.uk