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GETTING WITH THE PLAN

Planning policy continues to evolve at pace and it seems that no planning minister is able to stay in office long enough to see whether or not these changes are actually having an impact.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been amended for the first time since 2012. Notwithstanding wider arguments about whether or not July's amendments to the NPPF will bear fruit in terms of housing delivery for the country, there are some encouraging changes that should create opportunity for rural development. These include:

- improved definitions for those qualifying for rural workers' dwellings (including an inference that new houses will be permitted where farmers are retiring)
- encouragement for smaller scale developments in rural areas (rural exception sites) and easing of the requirement for affordable houses with these sites
- opportunities for village development
- continued support for reuse of rural buildings
- easing the planning pathway for rural sites when looking at sustainability and sequential tests
- increased support for neighbourhood plans provided they identify and provide houses as well

Whilst, as always, changes to NPPF will take time to fully percolate down to Local Planning Authority (LPA) level, these are not guidelines but rules that all authorities must abide by. Where things become more interesting is where you mesh the rural threads set out in the NPPF with other considerations such as permitted development, emerging agricultural policy and new strategies for affordable housing.

We have already achieved significant residential planning permissions for clients where wider benefits are brought into play, such as environmental improvement, and if Mr Gove's plan for UK farm support comes to fruition we could see further opportunities in this regard. With other forces at work in the farming world such as banning certain herbicides and weed resistance, many farmers are looking to a more traditional arable rotation with grass leys and livestock - bringing further planning opportunity.

We have also been involved in the delivery of affordable housing schemes that are administered by the client and not by a registered social landlord - with these schemes also delivering open market housing.

Coupled with this, many LPAs are to be lauded for introducing more rural-friendly policies into their plans. Most are now supportive of moves by farmers towards rural diversification.

Farmers and landowners should look carefully at these opportunities when considering the future.

PUSHING THE VILLAGE ENVELOPE

With many LPAs bringing their local plan more in line with government guidance in terms of housing delivery, many are now focusing on the potential for extending villages.

We are seeing an increasing number of approaches from developers and promoters in this regard and can advise clients both in terms of potential joint venture parties, values and the wider planning context.

The revised NPPF includes detailed reference to the need to shape development policy to allow development around villages, giving those settlements the opportunity to grow and thrive. Owners of land adjoining villages should act now to assess whether this shift in planning policy presents opportunity for them to develop land, often on the fringe of the farm or estate.

BCM have already been involved with a number of schemes that allowed smaller scale developments on the edge of villages, often involving outlying and outmoded farm building complexes and green fields. The change in planning policy means there is considerable renewed interest in such sites. Through our network of promoters and developers, together with our track record of delivering such development and selling similar sites, we are uniquely placed to advise clients in this regard.

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