

this month

A developing story...



Planning laws have always been a nightmare for anyone involved in infrastructure development. But then again, were they ever intended to be straightforward? Every one talks about growth these days, but many seem to have forgotten that homes, and by extension people, are the foundation of growth. How housing is developed is not to be taken lightly, as it shapes everything else.

So while many might question whether the current system is stifling development, spare a thought for local planning departments that often appear under fire from all sides and left with an impossible job. Of course we need to build more homes, but not every area has swathes of brownfield land just waiting for fashionable redevelopments.

Authorities who build on the green belt are heavily criticised, but likewise authorities that develop Local Plans, which supposedly don't have the right amount of housing, often get them knocked back by the Planning Inspectorate. Developers argue that councils are holding them up with red tape, but the Local Government Association states that councils are approving nine in 10 planning applications while hundreds of thousands of homes with planning permission are still waiting to be built.

And on top of all this, there is the threat from government that councils could have control taken away from them, despite the fact there is no real overarching national plan yet.

Accommodating those three pillars of development: economic, social and environmental, not to mention cultural and architectural desires, is no easy task. Now consider the pressures facing local departments without the funding for the necessary supporting infrastructure.

The country needs to find the right mechanism to help build and maintain the infrastructure at the time of development, when it is most cost effective, not as an afterthought.

Council directors talk about the need for more cash to tackle the problem of new homes 'our creaking infrastructure is struggling to support'. For instance we can't keep feeding hundreds of new homes into ageing Victorian drainage systems any longer, otherwise dealing with surface water flooding, which we know is happening more frequently, will become impossible to manage and our networks will deteriorate at an even faster rate.

Surveyor understands talks are taking place between ministers and the District Councils' Network on the subject of housing. What would be the best outcome? Sustainable developments that deal with the housing crisis but address infrastructure issues as well, is the simple answer. But that doesn't mean there is a simple solution. Let's hope we can head in the right direction.

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