

Headlines

Open Source Planning - Conservative Green Paper on the planning system

The planning green paper makes a number of radical and controversial proposals:

- All national planning policies will be consolidated into a 'national planning framework'. The current planning policy guidance notes and statements will be replaced by short guidance notes
- Abolish regional government, Regional Spatial Strategies, Regional Planning Bodies and national and regional building targets. They will be replaced by local decision-making on house building
- Local authorities will not be required to have affordable housing targets in their local plans, however they will be incentivised to provide affordable housing by receiving 125% of the Council Tax raised by the housing for six years
- A new presumption in favour of "sustainable development" which makes it unlawful for a planning authority to refuse permission for such a development where it conforms to the local plan
- Replacing the Community Infrastructure Levy (due to come into effect in April 2010) by a 'single unified local tariff', a proportion of which would be handed to the community. The CLA has challenged whether it should be imposed on rural developments
- Replacement of the current Use Classes regime by a new 'Flexible Zoning' system, which requires local authorities to specify a range of acceptable uses for separate zones in their areas, within which changes of use could take place without permission
- Allow third-party appeals against planning decisions (on two limited grounds)
- Toughen councils' ability to resist out-of-town development by giving them new powers to take competition issues into account when drafting local plans
- High-quality farmland will be protected from house building

The British Property Federation and Home Builders Federation have both criticised the proposals, claiming they will cause chaos and prove 'high risk' by allowing decision making to be taken at a local level. The proposals give a lot of power back to local communities, which is laudable, but at what cost in terms of the quality of decision-making, certainty of outcomes and need for some strategic developments.

Agriculture Industry Greenhouse Gas Action Plan

The CLA, NFU and Agricultural Industries Confederation, acting as the Climate Change Task Force, has issued its action plan to reduce green house gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture by 11% (or 3mt of CO₂) by 2020. The plan is a voluntary response by the countryside bodies, rather like the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, to avoid further regulation. The main ways of achieving the reduction in emissions is a more efficient use of nitrogen, livestock management, energy and fuels.

Agriculture

Pesticide consultation

Defra is consulting on how to implement new EU pesticides legislation, the outcome of which could have serious implications for all aspects of the industry. Click [here](#) for further details.

Farmgate milk prices fall...but prospects for 2010 are better

The annual average UK price for 2009 was 23.7ppl, 2.2p or 8.5% lower than a year ago. It represents a £17,600 drop in income for an 'average' farmer producing 800,000 litres. The outlook for 2010, however, is better.

Bank lending to farming increases

Farmers' borrowings increased by 4.1% over 2009, according to the Bank of England. Much of the increase is in the livestock and dairy sectors. Lending in 2010 will depend on commodity prices.

Severe Weather Grant Scheme

The Scottish Government has launched this scheme to support businesses affected by buildings collapsing during January. It aims to help avoid animal health and welfare problems by supporting the cost of renting livestock accommodation from another business and / or providing temporary buildings. For further details click [here](#).

Dairy emergency aid

The Government is consulting on how to distribute its slice of the EU's aid package. Two options are suggested – a flat rate payment to all milk producers or a tiered payment scheme with lower rates for larger producers. A farmer with 100 milkers producing average yields could receive about £1400. Payments to be made by July.

Culling does not produce long-term reductions in TB

Research by [Imperial College](#) shows that although widespread badger culling can achieve overall reductions in the incidence of cattle TB, the benefits are not sustained and the financial costs exceed the overall benefits.

Architecture & Building Surveying

VAT cut would benefit economy

Research by The Cut the VAT Coalition argues that reducing the VAT rate on repair and maintenance of homes to 5% would stimulate £17bn of economic activity by 2019.

Environment & Sustainability

Conservation plan for Welsh red squirrels

A new conservation plan for Red squirrels has been approved in Wales, where the species has suffered, as in the rest of the UK, by the proliferation of non-native grey squirrels.

Agriculture and climate change: a new term for you – 'bio-economy'

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations has published an interesting [report](#) on the contribution that agriculture plays in greenhouse gas emissions and its role in adaptation and mitigation to climate change. Livestock is the key sector as it uses 80% of the world's agricultural area. The main way the report seeks to reduce emissions is by increasing the efficiency of conversion of food / fodder into livestock products. The Royal Society has also published a [report](#) on the same subject. It calls for an increase in funding in the 'bio-economy' in a bid to sustainably increase food production intensity without adverse environmental impacts.

Feed In Tariff or Clean Energy Cashback scheme

The Government has announced the tariffs for this scheme, which incentivises small to medium scale renewable electricity generation. It is available to most organisations and provides a guaranteed payment for each unit of eligible renewable electricity generated - irrespective of how it is used.

Estate Management

Local authorities compiling lists of private supplies

The Private Water Supplies Regulation 2009 is now in effect and the first action for local authorities is to make a list of all the supplies in their area.

General

Liberals would reinstate Empty Property Rate Relief

The Liberals are the first party to say that they would reinstate empty property rate relief; this would be good news for rural areas as our research has found examples of occasions when new developments have been delayed because of concerns about liability for rates on empty property.

"Buy farmland and gold"

Market analyst Dr Marc Faber, who correctly predicted the 1987 US stock market crash and the current financial crisis, has advised investors to buy farmland and gold (as you can carry it).

Broadband Line Information Monitoring Project (BLIMP)

This project aims to measure the broadband speeds which are being achieved in the real world. The data will be used by Regional Development Agencies to try to improve broadband speeds. Click [here](#) for the speed tracker!

Consultation on bringing forward rural housing sites

The Government has been consulting on how to incentivise landowners to put forward sites, and refers to research Smiths Gore carried out on behalf of the RICS which found that a third of landowners said that they would be willing to bring forward sites for the provision of affordable housing, subject to suitable conditions. The fact that the Government is consulting on this is a significant change in emphasis; current policies, which largely exclude landowners' interests, have failed to bring forward enough sites. The Conservatives and Liberals both have more radical policies to encourage more rural affordable housing.

Property Agency

Residential market update

- Mortgage lending fell 32% in January, the lowest monthly total since February 2000 (Council of Mortgage Lenders)
- Nationwide report a 1% fall in house prices in February, which they attribute to one-off factors, including loss of momentum after the end of the stamp duty holiday and icy weather deterring viewing, rather than the start of a downward trend.
- The number of repossessions is expected to rise by 15% in 2010 (to 53,000) as the Council of Mortgage Lenders believes that repayment problems could persist long after the recession. During the recession in the 1990s, repossessions remained above 40,000 a year for seven years. So although 2009 was not as bad as the CML originally expected (@70,000 repossessions forecast), expect a long-tail.
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And finally...

Financial performance

"For what it is worth Sir, If Barclays is doing so well, how is it that my £6,000 PEP, bought in 1997, now only has a face value of £5,900?" Edmund Price, Hants

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this briefing, its information may not be comprehensive and recipients should not act upon it without seeking full professional advice.

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