Localism and the rise of social media create perfect storm for developers

With the Government’s Localism Bill becoming an Act of Parliament, having been given Royal Assent on 15 November (2011), landowners, developers and local communities are beginning to feel its impact as the power of Central Government over the planning process is shifted to councils, local communities and individuals.

Some commentators see this as a battle between planning for growth vs putting power into local hands.

While there are certainly many arguments ahead regarding the Act’s merits, what is increasingly certain is that, where planning applications are to be submitted, the process of prior public consultation will be seen as crucial by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) as they look to streamline the determination process and reach decisions within statutory timescales.

Most LPAs will be expecting that the majority of, if not all, planning issues to have been resolved prior to the submission of any application. This places far greater emphasis upon developers and landowners to enter into a dialogue with all interested parties and engage with all relevant stakeholders.

“It will no longer be enough simply to pin the planning application form to the nearest fencepost or put an advert in the local paper,” says BNP Paribas Real Estate’s head of London planning, Matthew Walton.

“Community consultation needs to be a far more sophisticated process these days. Major applications will need to be supported direct communication using both traditional and online media along with public exhibitions and conferences, press briefings and meetings with politicians.
“The growth of social media and its impact on businesses and communities is of major importance to the process. Communicating key development information online will become a vital element of the consultation process and something which developers and landowners cannot afford to ignore.

“In many respects the integration of social media into the everyday lives of millions of people has given them all a voice and a lobbying platform. The rise of citizen journalism and the Government's localism agenda have created a perfect storm for those submitting controversial or sensitive planning applications.”

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