

## Property Week.

# ANALYSIS

**LEADER** Giles Barrie, editor

## 'Clumsy' Pickles creates localism chaos

UK property development has come to a standstill in the wake of communities secretary Eric Pickles' abolition of regional planning targets on 27 May.

Across the UK, developers have seen schemes deferred or thrown out after action that has stunned the entire property world.

Councils don't know what they are doing, local businesses haven't a clue, people are waiting for new homes, offices and shops – all while the threat of a "double dip" recession begins to grow.

So with parliament rising this week, it is the perfect time to review Pickles' strategy and the localism concept from which it is derived (analysis + opinion, p30-p32).

Central control of planning has always ebbed and flowed. This time, the Conservatives' zeal for decentralisation is turbo-charged by David Cameron's "big society" initiative, which is also a cracking way to cut costs.

This is fine in principle, but the government's plans so far show serious flaws when put into practice on the ground. Let's start with appeals, which have until now been passed upwards for adjudication.

In many instances, a project is refused because it fails to accord with the local plan. But what if there are other material considerations involved? Newbury Council would have refused a huge new Vodafone headquarters in the 1990s on the basis of its local plan, but would this have been right for the town?

What happens, too, in smaller councils, where there are not enough senior planners to make these choices?

Next, what are the incentives for these local councils to give consents?

Local authorities will be rewarded with six years of council tax for every new home built and occupied, and 1.25 times that for affordable housing. But if we are in leafy Surrey, where between 200 and 300 homes a year are built, the £12,000 on offer for each property would translate to a maximum of £3.6m a year. It's hardly an incentive to encourage a local building boom – and is the money even there?

The next step in the government's plan is to publish a localism and decentralisation bill by November and a national planning framework by April 2012. Surely, though, this is the wrong way around: a positive, national planning statement that endorses the promotion of "sustainable development" that was promised in the Conservatives' pre-election planning green paper needs to be made – and fast.

Cutting the deficit is right, as is rebalancing the control and responsibility for planning decisions across the country. But with no transition plan to the new era in place, Pickles and co. have made a clumsy and reckless start.

### Scrope provides an admirable service

Harry Scrope is not a name that trips off property lips, but CB Richard Ellis's cross-border industrial and logistics expert must be an early candidate for 2011 Property Personality of the Year.

Ex-army man Scrope last week raised £100,000 for soldiers, veterans and bereaved service families of ex-servicemen by persuading the cream of the industry to attend a charity golf day (briefing, p38-p39).

Property should do more for the services. Contact Harry at [harry.scrope@cbre.com](mailto:harry.scrope@cbre.com) to play your part.

