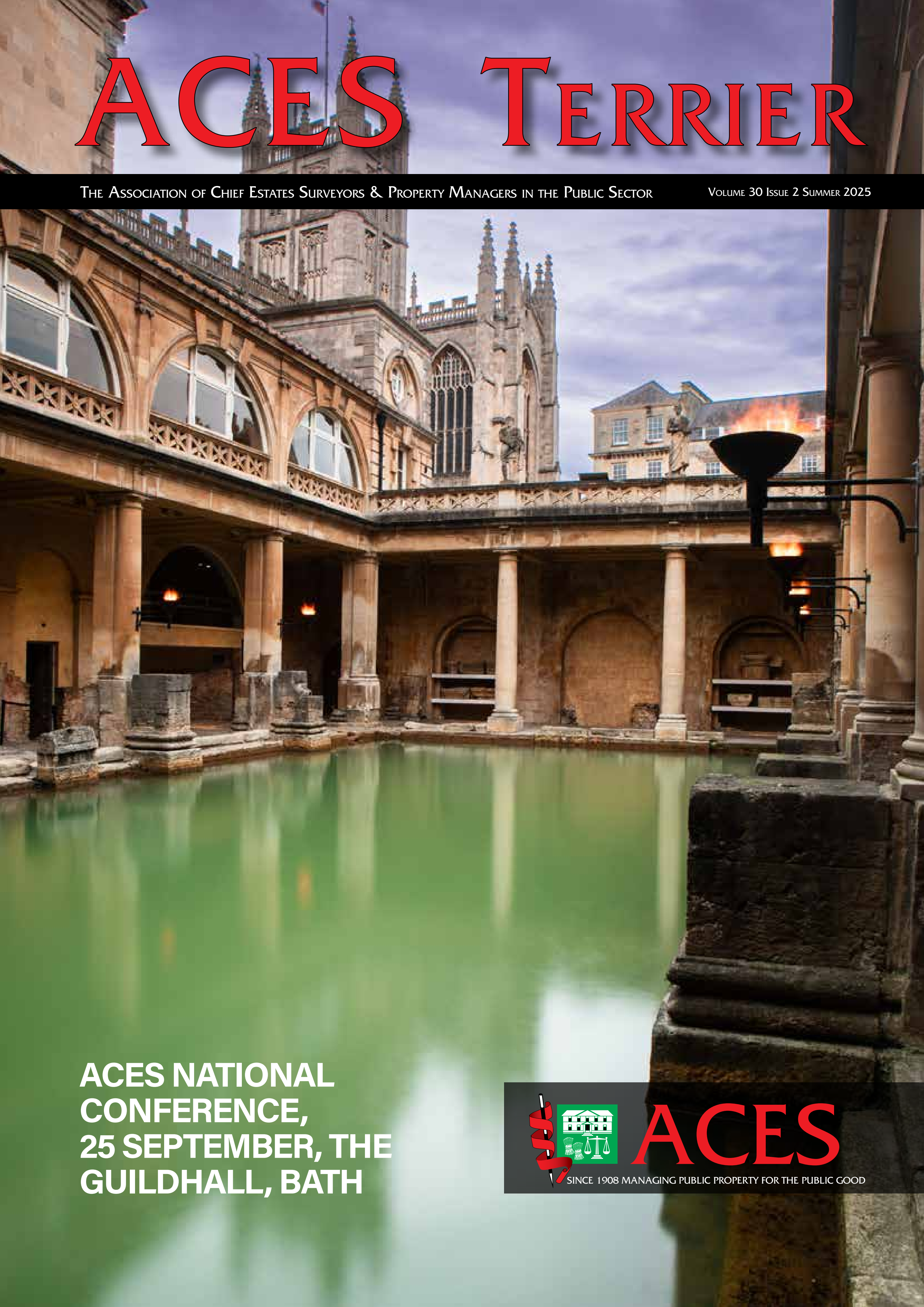
ACES Terrier

The Association of Chief Estates Surveyors & Property Managers in the Public Sector

Volume 30 Issue 2 Summer 2025



ACES NATIONAL CONFERENCE, 25 SEPTEMBER, THE GUILDHALL, BATH

ACES

SINCE 1908 MANAGING PUBLIC PROPERTY FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

VOLUME 30 - ISSUE 2 - Summer 2025

ACES TERRIER

The Journal of ACES - The Association of Chief Estates Surveyors & Property Managers in the Public Sector

EDITORIAL

Betty Albon editor@aces.org.uk

Welcome to the 2025 Summer Terrier.

We're into the second heat wave in Sunny Suffolk. I'm just finding time to prepare this issue in between watering, which is bordering on non-stop. But at least the apricot crop is ripening nicely.

Once more I have all my established and new authors to thank sincerely for contributing to another bumper beach read for members. An especial thanks to ACES' members who have written, including almost a full house of branch reports (I won't name and shame the one missing branch!), and a case study which illustrates the broad range of professional expertise ACES members need to harness. Thanks to those branches which have directed me to their speakers who are willing to follow up with articles.

Please look out for information about the National Conference at Bath on 25 September. President Dan Meek and his team are working hard and the programme is well advanced. Take a look at the flyer and link to ACES' dedicated website. Thanks to our four corporate members who make the conference possible and very affordable, with prices pegged at last year's rates.

This Terrier has a few themes, but particularly elements of housing and how the government's ambitious target might be reached. Linked to this are articles on requirements for biodiversity. There are some pieces of interest for the FACES cohort, career-based and experience-based, to encourage young surveyors. Plus professional advice to help with the day job.

Please share ACES' Terrier with colleagues - in hard copy and online www.aces.org.uk/library/.

While every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information and content provided in this document at the date of publication, no representation is made as to its correctness or completeness and no responsibility or liability is assumed for errors or omissions.

The views expressed by the authors are not necessarily those of ACES. Neither the authors or ACES nor the publisher accept any liability for any action arising from the use to which this publication may be put.

Roman Baths, Bath, courtesy of Tom Deller, Events & Hospitality Manager, Bath and North East Somerset Council.

CONTENTS

ACES National
National Council - Trevor Bishop....04
Membership news - Trevor Bishop....08

Professional
High Street Rental Auctions - Dan Gordon....12
Broad Marsh regeneration - Phil Farrell....15
My legacy - Richard Allen....20
LA intervention, Worcester - Kevin Moore....26
LA trading companies - Jemma Shorrock....30
Legacy housing developments - Johnny Clayton....32
Housing case study, Germany - Iain Mulvey....34
Permitted development rights - Andy Jones....36
Future Homes Standard - Alan Wright....38
Commonhold - Mark Chick....40
Investment in infrastructure - Rebekah Formosa....43
Heat networks - Nick Helm....46
Community ownership - Mark Walton....48
Biodiversity Net Gain - Tom Procter....51
Nature recovery opportunities - Jess Bradley....54
Model Estate performance 2025 - Sophie Davidson....58
Journey to chartership - Adam Quinn....62
APC Assessors - Jen Lemen....65
Valuer Registration Scheme - Donna Best....67
Red Book valuations - Donna Best....69
Compulsory purchase - Jeremy Pilgrim....72
Espresso Briefings - Andrew Ewbank....76
AI and property management - Sam Caulton....79
NHS real estate challenges - Rob Burke....83
Tariffs and property investment - Kevin Joyce....86
Airport rogue parking operators - David Asker....89
Reflections on ACES - Neil Webster....91

Branches news
Rural Branch history - Charles Coats....93
North East - John Read....94
South East - Marcus Perry....95
Scottish - Vince Guz....95
Heart - Kevin Moore....95
North West - Steve Littler....96
Welsh - Gerry Devine....97
Eastern - Jacqueline Cumisky....98
London - Chris Rhodes....99

Other interest areas
Bentley Memoirs - Dave Bentley....100

NATIONAL COUNCIL

Notes of ACES Council Meeting held on 24 April 2025

Trevor Bishop, ACES Secretary secretary@aces.org.uk

This was a hybrid meeting and the face-to-face element was held at the Offices of the Government Property Agency, Birmingham. Twenty three members attended the meeting in person or remotely, making the meeting quorate.

Detailed reports on the majority of these topics are published on the ACES' website www.aces.org.uk .

Minutes and action points of previous meeting

The minutes of the Council Meeting held on 31 January 2025 were approved as a correct record.

The action points arising from the last meeting were displayed for the information of members as a device for keeping track of items and responsibilities for actions.

Matters arising

Covered by action points.

Keith Jewsbury asked about item 1556 in the January Minutes regarding a proposed annual grant to branches which he felt should be on the action points. The Assistant Secretary advised it would be covered under the "Delivering Priorities" agenda item, which would include how ACES supported and worked better with branches.

President's report

The President, Dan Meek, reported on his activities since the last meeting. He referred to the work he had undertaken in progressing the 2025 Conference and the visit made by Marcus Perry to Bath, to explore hotels and social programme options.

It was noted that productive discussions were in hand with prospective partners keen to support the conference this year. Discussions with the other Corporate Members confirmed their willingness also to support the conference. A good number of key speakers had also been assembled. There was discussion on practical matters as the date for the conference approached and there was general agreement that the bookings should be done through Eventbrite again this year, as it worked well in 2024 [Ed – see conference flyer in this issue].

The President referred to branch matters including visits for the year and recently working with Marcus Perry on solutions for the problems in the South East Branch. He also mentioned a number of key issues being dealt with in the Rural Branch.

It was acknowledged that the Junior Vice President had yet to be identified and the President had been working closely with Sara Cameron and it was hoped that a positive update would be provided shortly.

Secretary's report

The Secretary reported on matters arising during the period since the last meeting. He provided the latest statistics on membership, which showed a continuing increase in membership numbers [Ed – see latest membership breakdown in Trevor's second report]. This was in the context of a number of members resigning upon receipt of membership invoicing but countered by new members. It also took into account a number of memberships that had recently been terminated due to persistent arrears.

It was pleasing to report that the increase in membership included some organisations new to ACES. Charts were displayed showing the increase in membership over the last 5 years and the number of members by category, showing a corresponding increase in full membership.

The Secretary referred to the subscription invoicing for 2025 and reported good progress with this. The plan remains that those members who are not invoiced at the beginning of the calendar year will be brought into line with an aim that all members are invoiced from 1 January 2026.

The Assistant Secretary, David Pethen, reported on several tasks that he had been charged with since his appointment and was pleased to say he had been kept busy. He referred to some ideas he had in order to streamline some processes and improve efficiency, and he was pleased to report that the NE Branch provided very good feedback on its member survey he had arranged in conjunction with them.

Financial matters

The Treasurer, Chris Hewitt, presented his report on the financial position of the Association.

He tabled an updated management accounts document which showed a Statement of receipts and payments on a quarterly basis. This was in a slightly different format to previous reports as it had been generated in Xero. He talked through the detail in the report, particularly providing an update on the new membership subscription invoicing process. Again, there were no concerns to report about ACES' underlying financial performance.

The statement of bank balances also indicated a healthy closing balance for the Association.

A number of queries were raised from the floor and responded to accordingly. Regarding ACES' position with VAT, the Treasurer reported that the accountants' recommendation not to register for VAT still holds. It was agreed to review annually.

The latest accounts from the Treasurer are published on the ACES website.

Reference was made to the idea of generating more income from the website for job advertising. The Assistant Secretary talked through a paper on this matter with proposals for compiling a list of agencies who were interested in working with ACES, and recommendations for taking matters forward, in conjunction with the Head of Engagement, as follows:

1. Make contact with short-listed recruitment agencies and see what they say too
2. Collate responses and agree preferred agencies with which to progress discussions
3. Report back to July Council with results and options offered by respective recruitment agencies.

These were approved by Council. Other potential agencies to speak to were tabled. It was further agreed that the agencies be approached with a view to securing preferential rates for ACES members seeking to use their services.

Report of Head of Engagement

The Head of Engagement, Neil Webster, talked through his detailed report on matters arising during the period since the last meeting including the Public Sector Forum, Public Sector Challenge, Year 9 Initiative, Corporate Membership, FACES (upcoming meeting in London), LocatED events, RICS and Government Property Function. Neil specifically asked for topics from members for the next RICS Public Sector Forum, to be chaired by our President [Ed – for a full rundown of the activities of HoE, see Neil's article in this issue].

Consultations

The Senior Vice President (SVP), Alan Richards, reported that responses to requests for members to comment on consultations was very limited, but it was acknowledged that many members were under severe pressure on other matters. He will explore the option of working with branches to see if this could help raise response rates.

ACES' Terrier

The Editor, Betty Albon, referred to the latest edition of ACES' Terrier (2025 Spring) which had now been published online and noted that the hard copy of the journal should be arriving shortly with those that had requested it. She referred to a good number of articles from ACES members this time and thanked those that had contributed. Her next task was to enter into advertising agreements for the year from July (for those firms that were not corporate members) and she advised that the advertising rates had been kept the same as last year. This approach was endorsed by Council.

The Editor referred to the latest quotation from Marcus Macaulay for photography and recording at the conference and AGM. The Editor confirmed that she had agreed provisionally the appointment of Marcus. This approach was endorsed by Council.

Core Management Team

The Secretary reported that the Core Management Team had met from time to time to discuss items to bring forward to Council for notification or for approval as necessary.

The following actions and decisions had taken place requiring endorsement or approval of Council:

<u>ACES Terrier Dedicated Website</u> – the Editor has presented a report to CMT on the proposed Terrier Website together with the quotation from Marcus Macaulay, which it is pleasing to see has not been increased from his previous quotation (report and quotation on the website). There was general consensus from CMT that this was a good step forward for ACES' Terrier and Council is asked to endorse CMT decision to enter into a contract with Marcus proposed as follows:

- Initial set up of the website, which includes uploading the current issue and creating a media pack with examples of advertising space web banners etc
- Hosting and maintenance of the website, so the articles get out on to the search engines and LinkedIn
- Uploading future issues.

It is noted that there will be a resource implication for the Association with regard to maintenance and advert invoicing which needs to be monitored. Council approved proceeding with the proposals.

<u>Social Media Manager</u> – Head of Engagement submitted a report to CMT setting out ideas discussed with Sara Cameron with regard to the Social Media Manager role.

A meeting had been held with an ex-journalist now undertaking portfolio work. Her last big role was marketing and social media for the South of Scotland Destination Alliance.

As a result of the meeting there is confidence in the applicant performing the role and should be offered a position. CMT has agreed to take this forward as a recommendation to Council. The position will be subject to the previously approved job description, the current officer hourly rate, and an indicative four hours a week. The appointment will also follow the standard approach of a fixed term subject to an initial probationary period of 3 months.

Linked to this is the request from Jacqueline Cumiskey to have access to the main ACES LinkedIn account so she could post Eastern Branch items and whether this should be extended to other branch secretaries. It is proposed the new Social Media Manager addresses this request.

Council approved proceeding with the appointment of the Social Media Manager.

2025 Junior Vice President - The President and Immediate Past President have reported to CMT on several suggestions and approaches with regard to filling the vacant role of Junior Vice President. Discussions are ongoing and the latest position will be reported to Council accordingly. The President confirmed he will raise the issue at his trips around branches. Discussion took place on offering the position to a retired member and the question of whether the Presidential role should be for two years, which may or may not be consecutive years. Council noted the position and requested that an item on the Presidential role be brought to a future Council meeting.

Proposals for South East Branch - Following the decision of January Council, Marcus Perry, in consultation with the President, held a number of meetings with SE Branch members and presented his proposals to CMT for approval. Details of the proposals are contained in the report published on the website and CMT has approved the proposed way forward.

Corporate Membership 2025/26 - CMT was given authority by ACES Council in April 2024 to approve packages for existing and new Corporate Members (CMs) for the next 3 years. In the light of experience gained and ongoing relationships with the existing CMs, it has been proposed and agreed by CMT that the packages remain the same as those agreed for 2024/25. Discussions are now in hand with the four main CMs and progress is being made with signing up additional new CMs as interest in the 2025 Conference begins to strengthen. Council noted the position.

Priorities, Timescales and Resources for 2025 - CMT re-affirmed that the Constitution Review, Membership Review and Data Management should be the immediate and core priorities for 2025.

The issue of progressing matters through volunteers when they are already burdened by heavy full-time job demands was considered again by CMT. As a result, it has been agreed with the Assistant Secretary that he looks to extend his current role to take a prominent lead on the priorities and to explore the mechanisms for further paid external support.

In response to this, David has developed, as requested at January Council, thinking on the impact of LGR/Devolution on the Association. CMT has agreed for a paper on this, and the consequences for the Constitution and Membership Reviews, to be presented to Council.

Impact of the LGR review and devolution agenda

The Assistant Secretary reported on the potential impact of imminent changes and measures the Association should consider and gave an overview of Local Government Reform (LGR) and reorganisation over the years, and then described the current proposals for a smaller number of large scale authorities in the context of a number of changes in estate and asset management.

The long-term impact on the Association was uncertain, but the expectation was a potential reduction in membership in the six or seven branches considered likely to be directly impacted. In this context, it was important that we think centrally about how we can support our members in branches going through LGR. This raised the question of a detailed survey of members to explore what was working well now and what needs to change. It was also clear that the impact of LGR and devolution should form a key part of the review of the Constitution and Membership Review.

LGA should also be consulted as part of CMT actions and it was noted that we should not exclude health colleagues in our review as they will also be impacted. Consulting the branches was a key element of gaining knowledge on the impact of LGR/Devolution.

Council approved the proposed actions in the Assistant Secretary's report set out below:

- Note this initial presentation outlining the potential impact of LGR on ACES
- Nominate an ACES Member to be the ACES Lead/Coordinator for LGR
- Delegate to CMT to undertake a Survey to:
  - Identify LGR related issues affecting ACES members
  - Timetable for LGR impacting on members' local authorities
  - What support ACES members would benefit from
  - Prioritise survey and support identification for those members included in Devolution Priority Programmes
- Include LGR as a factor for consideration in the ACES Membership/Constitution Review
- Receive regular update reports on LGR Implementation.

A copy of the presentation is now uploaded with ACES April Council Meeting Papers.

ACES Constitution/ Membership review

The Assistant Secretary talked through his second presentation, Delivering Future Key Priorities. This built on the theme of "change" identified in the report on LGR and other external factors impacting on the members and their workload.

It was noted that organisationally ACES is currently well positioned/respected in the public property sector and well-resourced physically and financially. A centrally coordinated approach is required to deliver ACES' previously identified "Key Priorities" The overriding corporate objective is to support ACES Members and a draft "Corporate Objective" was tabled: "To support ACES members to maximise their full professional potential and to enable/share best practice in all aspects of public sector property asset/

estate management". This could best be implemented by knowing member's needs through effective consultation.

It was recommended that Council agree to:

The proposed Delivery Recommendations outlined in this Presentation:

- Establish a small delivery working group
- Scope identified "high level" issues
- Consult existing and potential ACES members and stakeholders with a working group to report further to July Council.

Council approved this course of action (presentation uploaded).

Annual conference 2025

The President referred to the update he had provided earlier on the agenda.

Marcus Perry gave an update on his proposals for the social programme with several local visits planned. He was also helping with choice of hotel which are inevitably expensive in Bath, but is working on a discounted rate in a nice Georgian style hotel [Ed – see flyer in this issue].

National AGM 2025

The SVP reported on progress being made with the arrangements for the national AGM this year. the Assistant Secretary provided an update on the venue, which is confirmed as Cardiff Castle. There may be an issue with maximum numbers which may impact on the catering arrangements, but David Pethen is looking at options.

ACES' Awards for Excellence 2025

The SVP reported on progress. He will follow the pattern of previous years and is considering a modest change to the award categories. There will be five categories: FACES Award, Team or Branch of the Year, Climate Resilience, Community Impact, and President's Award. The Awards Pack had now been prepared and details are planned to go out in June (via email and website) with a deadline for nominations in late August. Council members were asked to contribute towards pushing out the Awards to members.

Asset management in the public sector

The Secretary updated members on the SAM diploma course which continued to go very well with the help of the ACES members carrying out the presentations in a professional manner. CIPFA had been informed of ACES approval in principle to extend the collaboration and Malcolm Williams had followed this up in discussions with Mark Poppy and a "wash up" meeting was scheduled for June.

The Secretary made two recommendations for Council to approve:

1. An honorarium for Malcolm Williams for the year to April 2025
2. A gift for Richard Wynne for his valuable contribution to the SAM Diploma course and following his need to step back from his role.

Council approved both recommendations.

Branch Liaison Officer's report

Branch Liaison Officer Marcus Perry reported on activities and notably the proposals for the South East (SE) Branch, following discussions with key personnel.

He referred to the finalisation of the ACES new publicity/recruitment tri-fold handout which had now been widely distributed. Marcus thanked Betty Albon and Marcus Macaulay for their support in producing the document.

Marcus talked through the details that had been provisionally agreed with Sarah Varley in order to encourage her to take on the role of Chair at the branch (possibly for two years), with a view to putting things in better order over time. In particular, it was noted that none of the large counties in the SE were represented by ACES members and this needed to be tackled. Marcus noted there was no interest from any other member of the branch to take things forward. It was also commented that the appointment in part would take a lot of additional work away from Marcus, so he could move back onto other key elements of his role.

Council noted and endorsed the approval by CMT of the agreed package.

Marcus concluded with an update on his activities with the rest of the branches and was getting around them gradually. He was pleased to report that all seemed to be doing well and in good financial health.

Co-ordinators, branches and external working groups

Liaison Officer and Branch reports were received, and these have been published on the ACES website for the information of all members. Once again, thanks went to all those who had submitted detailed and topical reports which are appreciated by members.

Lee Dawson and Jeremy Pilgrim gave a verbal update on the Commercial Asset Management item which had been delayed following recent changes in personnel at Carter Jonas. Iain Mulvey had left the company and Lil Houghton has stepped up to a more senior role. The undertaking to work with CJ and produce an article for ACES' Terrier was still in place but would be delivered later in the year.

Daniella Barrow reported that the scheduled liaison meeting with RICS didn't go ahead for various reasons but contact had been maintained with the RICS on a number of fronts. The next meeting is in July.

Steve Littler gave a verbal report on activities in the NW Branch and in particular the ever popular CPD Event in May, which the President had kindly agreed to attend [Ed – see branch report].

Future meetings

ACES Council	24 July 2025	Manchester
Annual Conference	24/25 September 2025	Bath
ACES Council Meeting	15 October 2025	Online Meeting
Annual Meeting	20 November 2025	Cardiff

Any other business

On behalf of the SVP, the President reported on the "Peak Pursuit" Public Sector Challenge for 2025. Approval was sought to carry over underspend from 2024 and to commit to the event in 2025. ACES to be a corporate sponsor and provide a team of 10 members to participate. Council approved the proposals.

Jeremy referred to a document from RICS on Careers Guidance which he distributed. It was noted, however, with disappointment, that there was no reference to the public sector.

No other matters were raised.

ACES MEMBERSHIP

Trevor Bishop MRICS, ACES Secretary secretary@aces.org.uk

I list below the changes in membership between 1 April and 30 June 2025.

New members approved

There were 15 new applications approved during the period

First Name	Surname	Organisation	Branch Ref
Kevin	Tobin	Align Property Partners	NW
Harry	Travis	East Suffolk Council	E
James	Coulter	Falkirk Council	S
Matthew	Clemmetsen	Government Property Agency	L
Lucy	Radich	Government Property Agency	L
Sarah	Berry	Halton Borough Council	NW
Emily	White	Hertfordshire County Council	E
Stephen	Shapiro	London Borough of Camden	L
Sarah	Davies	Newport Norse Ltd	W
Lyndon	Watkins	Newport Norse Ltd	W
Fiona	Campbell	North East Derbyshire District Council	HoE
Antony	Clark	Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames	L
Stuart	Law	South Lanarkshire Council	S
Alex	Wildman	South Ribble Borough Council	NW
Louise	Parr	Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council	NW

Members transferred to past membership

Two members transferred to retired membership:

First Name	Surname	Branch Ref
Charlie	Field	SW
Heather	Hosking	L

Resignations

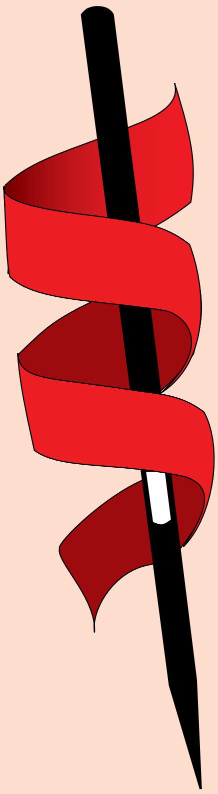
The following 14 members resigned during the period:

First Name	Surname	Organisation	Branch Ref
Peter	Burt	ACES Associate Member	L
Karen	Nickel	ACES Retired Member	NW
Eloise	Duffy	Ashford Borough Council	SE
Neofitos	Georghiou	Ashford Borough Council	SE
Jessica	Hamilton	Brighton & Hove City Council	SE
Andrew	Leah	Burnley Borough Council	NW
Giles	Cooper	Cumberland Council	NW
Mary	Cox	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	HoE
Louise	Risk	Halton Borough Council	NW
Matthew	Trewartha	High Peak Borough Council	HoE
Alan	Zierler	London Borough of Barnet	L
Paul	Aungier	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council	NW
Graham	Tombs	Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust	SW
Cassie	McAteer	West Dunbartonshire Council	S

Membership

Summary of current membership at 30 June 2025:

Total Membership	
Full	242
Additional	99
Honorary	37
Associate	15
Retired	36
Total	**429**



‘Why not use the ACES website for free* advertising of your job vacancies?

The ACES website Job Vacancies page (open to all) caters for member and non-member organisations advertising for public sector property posts.

The page gives a summary of the available post with the details of location, salary and closing date and provides a link to the organisation’s own website for further details and application form etc.

The Job Vacancies page is currently available to ACES member organisations to advertise opportunities **at no cost.**

You gain direct access to likely candidates already working in the public sector property arena with the expertise and experience that you are looking for.

The new and improved ACES website enables advertisers to enter their vacancy details direct online and include their logo, website links and required details (subject to approval by ACES Secretary).

*The cost per advert for non-members is currently £100.00 for a maximum of 4 weeks’ exposure on the ACES website; this is still excellent value!!

Contact the ACES Secretary, Trevor Bishop MRICS, at secretary@aces.org.uk for further information.


ACES
ACES National Conference 2025
Realising the Value of Land; and Local Government Reform
Venue: The Guildhall, Bath
Conference Date: Thursday 25th Sept 2025 (one day event)
Pre-Conference Networking Meal: Wednesday 24th Sept (evening)
Social Programme: Thursday 25th Sept (one day event)
For further information on speakers, agenda and how to book, see https://aces.org.uk/aces-national-presidential-conference-2025/

The Conference

The ACES flagship annual event will be an in-person conference on 25 September 2025 held in Bath, the only city in the UK to be designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in its entirety as a cultural site with outstanding universal value and cultural significance, due to its Roman remains, hot springs, eighteenth-century architecture, eighteenth-century town planning, social setting and landscape setting.

The conference will comprise two distinct sessions, but there will be plenty to learn for all in both. The morning session will focus on the important and wide-ranging value of owning and retaining land for public sector organisations, including models for delivering Biodiversity Net Gain 'in house', and strategies for managing the wide range of competing land use objectives.

It would be remiss of ACES not to major on Local Government Reform (LGR), following the launch of the devolution white paper in December 2024. The afternoon session will look at strategies for property, people, and place, together with being prepared and ensuring good governance in the lead up to, during and after LGR. We will be featuring a best practice and lessons learnt case study from a South West-located authority that has already been through LGR.

The Conference will deliver 6 hours formal CPD.

The delegate rate has been held at last year's cost, which represents exceptional value for money.

Cost – ACES Members - £100 (early bird) otherwise it's £125; Non-members - £170

The networking and social elements

Pre-Conference Networking Meal

Wednesday 24 September 2025 (evening) - held in the world famous Grade I listed Roman Baths and Pump Room. We will enjoy a drinks reception in the Roman Baths complex, followed by a 3-course meal in the Pump Rooms. Visitors can explore the complex, walk on the original Roman pavements and see the ruins of the Temple of Sulis Minerva. You can try the hot spa water at the fountain, which contains 43 minerals and has a rather unusual taste!

Cost - £75

Social Programme and Post Conference Meal

Thursday 25 September 2025 (one day event) - for those who prefer the social side to the conference, a fantastic social programme 'relaxing in Bath' has been arranged by Marcus Perry. The main programme will take place on Thursday with an optional informal meal on the Thursday evening.

Cost - £100 (social programme Thursday; **£50** meal at Beckford Bottle Shop on Thursday evening).

Accommodation

ACES has negotiated a competitive room rate at the 4-Star Abbey Hotel. There are ample alternative hotels in the city centre. For further information on the social programme and Abbey Hotel, see https://aces.org.uk/aces-national-presidential-conference-2025-social-programme/

Dan is a Senior Policy Advisor in the High Streets team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. He focuses specifically on the implementation of High Street Rental Auctions and presented to the ACES' North East Branch on 6 June. If you would like Dan, or a member of the team, to present at your branch meeting, please do get in touch at highstreetrentalauctions@communities.gov.uk

HIGH STREET RENTAL AUCTIONS
From theory to practice

Dan Gordon

Dan has kindly agreed to write this article, following his presentation to North East Branch. Thanks too to the branch for organising the article.

Context

The issue of vacancy on high streets is something that can be seen across the country. In the last quarter of 2024, vacancy rates were reported to be 13.5% across Great Britain (13.2% in England, 15.0% in Scotland and 17.2% in Wales) (Data source is the Local Data Company). It is a particular issue in certain areas of the country, with more than 1 in 4 shops vacant in some high streets in the north of England, for example.

The government is committed to revitalising our high streets. Persistent vacancy is a form of blight on our high streets and in our town centres, which can fuel a spiral of decline. High Street Rental Auction (HSRA) powers have been introduced to help combat this issue.

What are HSRAs?

HSRAs were introduced through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act [2023] and supporting regulations, and came into effect on 2 December 2024. They are a new permissive power available for local authorities in England to auction the lease of persistently vacant commercial high street property.

The process

The full process has a number of stages and potential routes that would be too lengthy for this piece, but the diagram gives an insight into the full process and the stages that would be required (with further guidance on gov.uk).

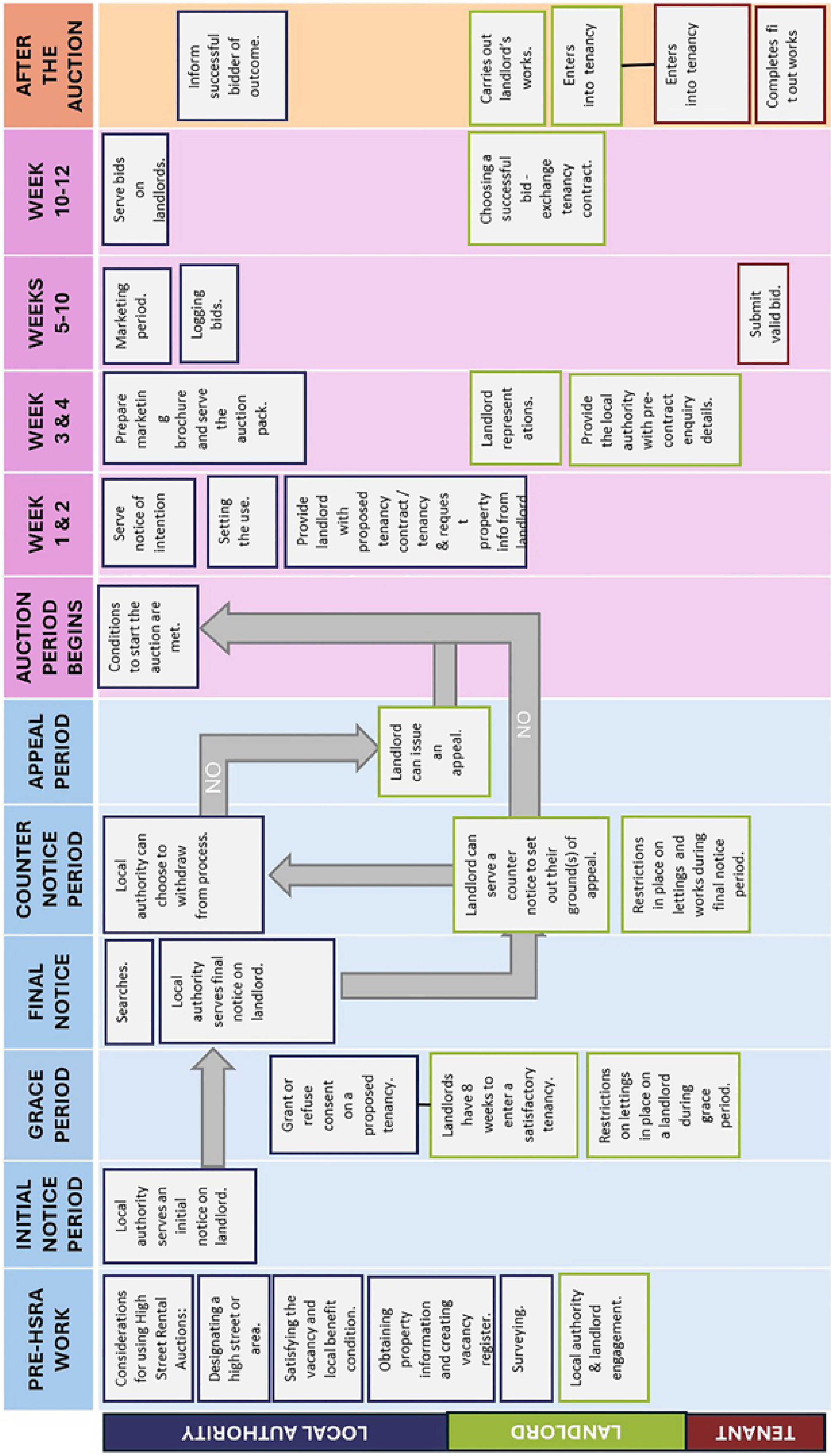
Premises are eligible for a HSRA where they are located in a designated high street and have been unoccupied continuously for 365 days, or for at least 366 days within a 24-month period (non-continuous).

The process has been designed to increase cooperation between landlords and local authorities, and to make town centre tenancies more accessible and affordable for tenants, including small businesses, community and voluntary groups. We do not expect HSRAs to apply to all vacant properties and we recognise that most landlords are proactive. The intention is to encourage collaboration, identify barriers to letting and find alternative solutions with landlords.

A landlord can be required to comply but there are safeguards built into the process, including an 8-week grace period for the landlord to re-let the premises themselves, and the ability for the landlord to participate in the auction process.

We are aware though that in some cases, absent or non-cooperative landlords can frustrate regeneration and repurposing efforts and therefore this power allows local authorities to tackle this. In these cases, the local authority may act on behalf of the landlord and seek a tenant via the auction process. The landlord will be obliged to accept the tenant on the terms agreed through the council-run auction. If a landlord does not engage with certain points of the process, there are mechanisms for enforcement built into the legislation.

The HSRA powers also give local authorities the ability to determine a suitable high street use. This can restrict


PRE-HSRA WORK
INITIAL NOTICE PERIOD
GRACE PERIOD
FINAL NOTICE
COUNTER NOTICE PERIOD
APPEAL PERIOD
AUCTION PERIOD BEGINS
WEEK 1 & 2
WEEK 3 & 4
WEEKS 5-10
WEEK 10-12
AFTER THE AUCTION
LOCAL AUTHORITY
LANDLORD
TENANT
Considerations for using High Street Rental Auctions:
Designating a high street or area.
Satisfying the vacancy and local benefit condition.
Obtaining property information and creating vacancy register.
Surveying.
Local authority & landlord engagement.
Local authority serves an initial notice on landlord.
Grant or refuse consent on a proposed tenancy.
Landlords have 8 weeks to enter a satisfactory tenancy.
Restrictions on lettings in place on a landlord during grace period.
Searches.
Local authority serves final notice on landlord.
Local authority can choose to withdraw from process.
Landlord can serve a counter notice to set out their ground(s) of appeal.
Restrictions in place on lettings and works during final notice period.
NO
Landlord can issue an appeal.
NO
Conditions to start the auction are met.
Serve notice of intention
Setting the use.
Provide landlord with proposed tenancy contract / tenancy & request property info from landlord
Prepare marketing brochure and serve the auction pack.
Landlord representations.
Provide the local authority with pre-contract enquiry details.
Marketing period.
Logging bids.
Submit valid bid.
Serve bids on landlords.
Choosing a successful bid - exchange tenancy contract.
Inform successful bidder of outcome.
Carries out landlord's works.
Enters into tenancy
Enters into tenancy
Completes fit out works

the types of activities that take place in premises subject to a rental auction. This could include limiting the provision of certain services in favour of businesses that local leaders feel will add the most value to the high street and the wider community.

Support on offer from MHCLG

Local authorities will have a suite of tools available to support them throughout the process.

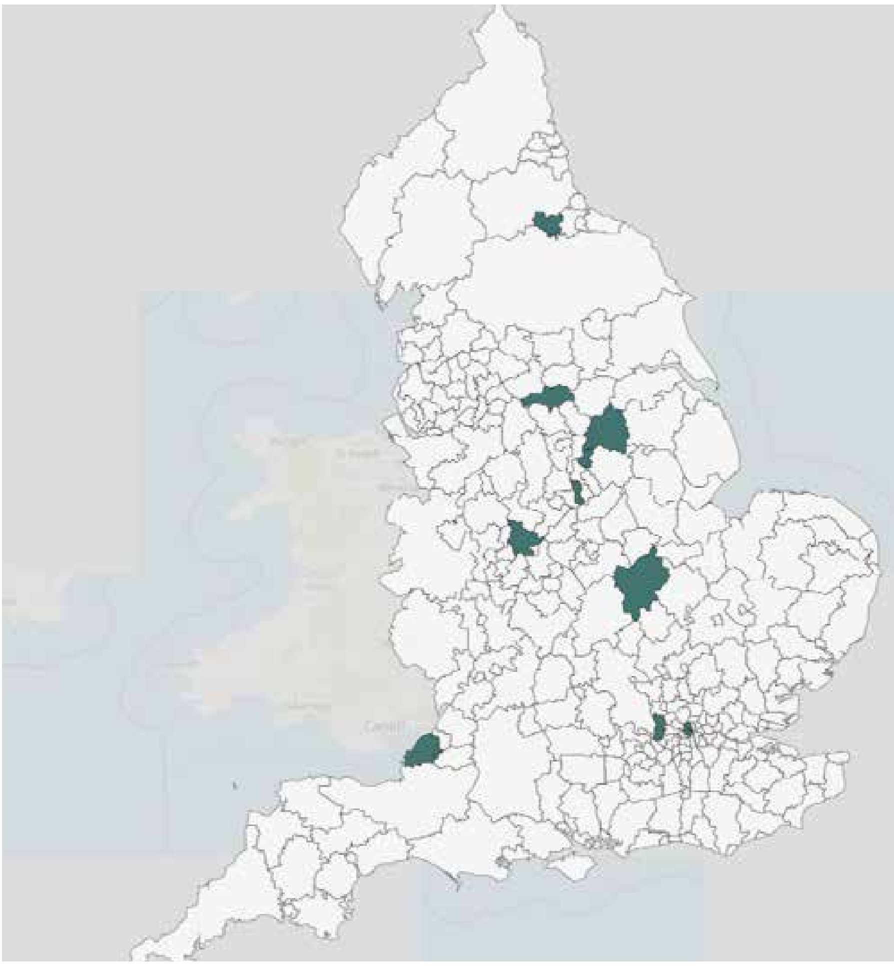
The tools include:

- Detailed non-statutory guidance setting out the steps
- Template notices, letters, packs and agreements to use throughout the process
- Offer from officials to meet with and/or respond to queries from any local authority looking to implement
- Regular bulletin and webinars to continually advertise these powers and share best practice
- A new burdens payment has been made available to local authorities to cover the costs of implementing the policy. The £5,223 payment is designed to cover the legal, marketing and auction costs, incurred in administering the policy. We are aware this may not end up being sufficient to cover all costs in the process and are therefore committed to review the new burdens amount in the autumn
- The policy is backed by over £1 million for 2025/26 to help local authorities implement the measures by supporting the creation of vacancy registers and covering the cost of refurbishing vacant properties.

Early adopters

All councils in England can now use HSRAs but we have announced 11 councils which are prioritising implementation as Early Adopters. They will share best practice, show how the powers are unlocking vital space on their high streets, and encourage others to do the same.

Our Early Adopters are Bassetlaw, Darlington, Mansfield, Barnsley, Broxtowe, Lichfield, Camden, Hillingdon, North Northamptonshire, North Somerset and Westminster.



Implementation so far

We are currently aware of the following local authorities designating their high street areas and going out to consultation: Lichfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Redcar and Cleveland, and Lewisham. Other councils are due to go live with their consultations imminently.

Councils who have completed their consultation on the designated area are reporting that even this first step has led to increased engagement with landlords, some of whom have not engaged with councils for years. It has also seen properties being renovated, put on sale and arrangements being made to find a tenant after, in some cases, years of vacancy.

One case study has been particularly encouraging. Rugby Borough Council has been strategically engaging with landlords ahead of plans to consult on designating its high street. One property there had remained unoccupied for over two years and had visibly fallen into disrepair. The council knew that although there was interest from potential tenants, the condition of the property and the high rental expectations were significant barriers. The council engaged with the agent, explaining the HSRA process and plans for use of these powers. Shortly after the council's intervention, the agent reported a significant shift in the landlord's position. The rent was reduced to a more market-appropriate level and the landlord committed capital to fund the necessary renovation works. As a result, heads of terms were agreed with a new tenant and the lease is expected to be completed with the tenant planning a light refit of the premises.

Other councils that are implementing are setting the internal foundations before designating their high streets. This includes getting approval internally, considering areas to designate by consulting local data, applying for funding to support the creation of a vacancy register, seeking internal legal advice, and mobilising project teams. Generally, these teams have included officers from economic development/regeneration, legal, planning, enforcement and communications departments.

We hope to see more positive stories emerge as further local authorities start to implement these powers. For any queries or further information on this process, please don't hesitate to contact MHCLG at highstreetrentalauctions@communities.gov.uk.

Phil is a director at property consultants JLL. He leads the development and public sector consulting teams across the East and West Midlands. He provides advice to the public sector on all aspects of development and property matters, including transactions, delivery structures and master plans. Phil has over 20 years' experience in the sector including five years away from JLL working for Homes England and Solihull Council's arm's length vehicle – the Urban Growth Company.

BROAD MARSH REGENERATION
A modern tale in an ancient setting

Phil Farrell Philip.Farrell@jll.com

Nottingham features again in this case study of partnership working and community consultation.

The legends of Robin Hood can be traced back to at least the 15th century, but they are still alive and well – would you believe that Hollywood is currently producing yet another new film with Hugh Jackman as the 'evergreen' hero?

I doubt the story of the Nottingham Broadmarsh development will still be retold 575 years from now, but for those of us involved, it has many of the attributes of a true saga: it has adversity, challenge, drama and heroes (or at least some experienced and well-intentioned property professionals, which is very similar in my opinion).

As a story for our times, I think Broadmarsh has lessons worth learning – how our urban areas still have to address the poor decisions of the past, how genuine regeneration takes time, dedication and resources, and that it can all still be achieved under the shadow of s114.

Some background is useful: like in many of our towns and cities, the post war clearance of poor quality dwellings and bomb damage in Nottingham had resulted in the construction during the 1970s of a huge shopping centre. The Broadmarsh Shopping Centre cut across many historic routes in the city, separated the main railway station from the city centre, and forced pedestrians into subways and bridges to ensure the car could dominate the environment. As with many of its ilk, the change in shopping habits and its dated environment left the Broadmarsh struggling and half empty by the early 2000s. Its owner, Intu, after many years of pressure from the council, and a number of aborted redevelopment plans, finally embarked in 2019 on a plan to transform it.

Nottingham City Council steps in

The enormous shopping centre was only part demolished when work paused due to Covid, and then ceased altogether as Intu slid in administration in June 2020.

Nottingham City Council held the freehold for Broadmarsh and in a very short period of time, moved from being a one third investor in the redevelopment, to having the virtual keys dropped into its reluctant hands and becoming fully financially responsible for a closed, half demolished 1970s liability.

It is worth considering that event. The City Council was already under the huge pressure of the Covid pandemic. It did not have a plan, a dedicated team, or a budget allocation for Broadmarsh, because it didn't know it would need them. Broadmarsh was a high-profile eyesore and potential symbol of decline in the very heart of the city. Robin only had to face the Sherriff of Nottingham.

The two images overleaf show the hoarded Broadmarsh Centre to the right, with Nottingham Castle in the distance, hidden by a multi-storey car park; and the Broadmarsh Centre when the council inherited it.

Like in all good representations of Robin

(Errol Flynn, Michael Praed, Kate Lonergan) and the many more bad ones (Sean Connery, Kevin Costner, Russell Crowe, Mel Brookes), we can gloss over the detail. No need to consider the cost and complexity of making the site secure, ensuring it was structurally safe, opening pedestrian routes, resolving all of the legal and title trailing wires left by the administration of Intu, dealing with third party interests. We can gloss over it here, but at the time it took hard work and skill, which the council staff have in abundance, and lots of spare money, which is markedly less abundant in any council.

This is where the story moves, in my mind at least, from development to regeneration. There is no accepted definition between the two, indeed most people would struggle to see the difference. I see development as the construction of buildings; regeneration is the creation, or re-creation, of communities, where the impact goes beyond just keeping the rain off residents' heads, also to consider social cohesion, employment, civic pride, etc. - all those intangible, but invaluable benefits.

A plan is pieced together

The City Council embarked on an exercise to understand what their residents wanted to do with Broadmarsh by launching the 'Big Conversation', a widespread public consultation. Following this, they appointed Thomas Heatherwick to continue the engagement and translate the results into architectural concepts. The people clearly wanted something different from the Broadmarsh Shopping Centre – they wanted a new permeable quarter that would provide public spaces, community activities, and alternative retail and leisure.

A clear vision emerged. It had many detractors who were keen to point out the lack of financial viability in some of the concept images. But they missed the point. The vision was for a new, vibrant neighbourhood that linked the city north to south and east to east. A place where the civic and social life of the city could be conducted. A place for all of the people of Nottingham.

The first part of the jigsaw was put in place when the council secured funding through Transforming Cities for the construction of the Green Heart, a high-quality area of public realm at the centre of what will become the new development. The image opposite shows the Broadmarsh Centre covered in hoarding, seen across the new Green Heart.

Developers who specialise in

regeneration could see the opportunity. Oon behalf of the council, JLL carried out some focused soft market testing on the vision. The response was very clear, developers loved Nottingham, and could see the huge opportunity that Broadmarsh presented, but had concerns over the technical challenge of reusing the existing structure, and overall scheme viability.

To tackle these concerns and guide future development, the council decided to use the limited funds they had available, and some financial support from Homes England's Markets, Partners and Place relationship team, to deliver a concept master plan and viability study. BDP (led by the redoubtable David Rudlin) was appointed to create the master plan, and JLL was appointed with Pick Everard to provide commercial and technical support.

Passionately directed by Paul Seddon, the City's Director of Planning, the project team worked hard during 2023 to create a commercially viable master plan that re-opened the traditional street patterns, introduced new uses, and delivered the open space and community activity that the public consultation had focused on. As the master plan was finalised and we moved to considering delivery routes in November 2023, the news dropped that the council had issued the s114 notice.

Progress despite Section 114

The issuing of a s114 notice required under the 1988 Local Government Finance Act is often described in the press as bankruptcy. However, unlike when a private company goes bankrupt, a local authority still has to perform all of the functions it had to before the announcement. Essentially, life goes on as normal in the council, but with hugely increased scrutiny of budgets and achieving value for money [Ed – see full article on s114 notices in 2025 Spring Terrier].

For Broadmarsh, the immediate impact was negligible. We proceeded to complete the master plan and viability appraisals and ensured it was ready to launch at UKREiiF in Leeds in May 2024.

The challenge came when we considered how the master plan would be delivered. The working assumption until the s114 was issued was that the City Council would carry out some enabling works, potentially secure an outline planning consent, and then enter into some form of public–private partnership to deliver the scheme. In the new reality, the council could not commit to a process potentially costing millions of pounds in professional and legal fees. They were also concerned about the availability of their own internal staff resources.

This could have been the moment of high drama in any Robin Hood film. The Sherrif and his evil henchmen have the upper hand, and Robin and his plucky

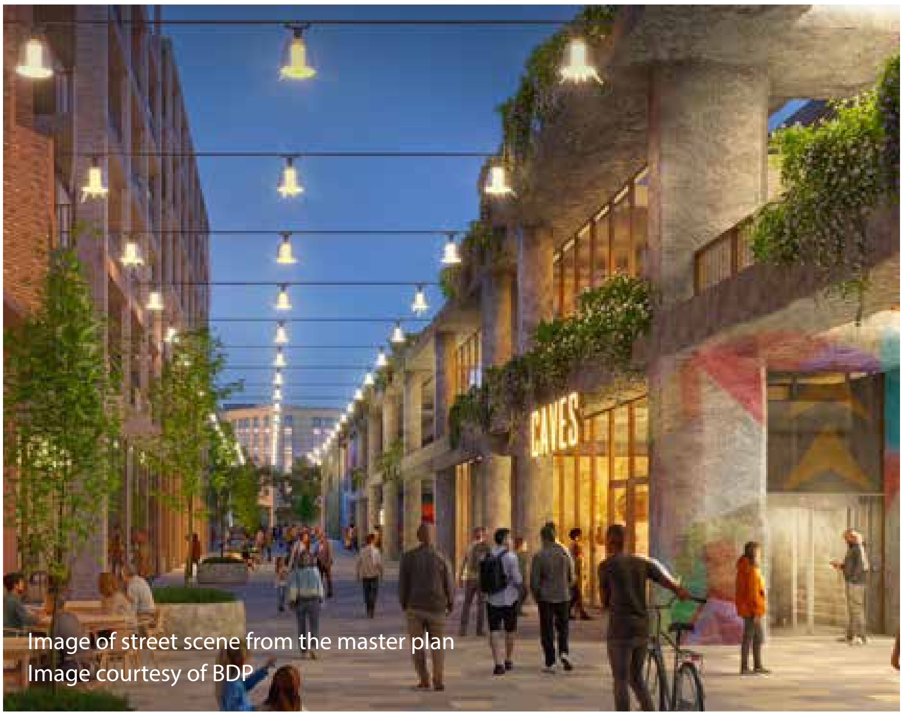


Image of street scene from the master plan
Image courtesy of BDP

band have to retreat to Sherwood Forest in disarray. Thankfully, Nottingham City Council does not consult Hollywood scriptwriters. The council, its supporters and consultants, just rolled up our sleeves and looked at our options.

JLL was asked to produce an analysis of the potential delivery options for Broadmarsh. Working closely with the property and finance teams, we identified the council's preferred outcomes, including the desire to be involved in key decisions, human and financial resource commitments, financial receipt, etc. All of the outcomes were then ranked and scored according to their importance to the council and the new reality of the s114 situation. We then considered all potential delivery structures and scored each against the council's preferred outcomes.

It sounds relatively straightforward as a process, but required some difficult decisions. How do you score short-term financial pressures against the benefits of cohesive regeneration for the city and its people for generations to come? The key theme that emerged was perhaps contradictory – the council did not have the funds to deliver its vision for Broadmarsh, but the vision was too important not to be delivered. The council needed a delivery partner that understood that true value (financial and social) would be delivered through the implementation of a cohesive master plan.

A partner with a shared vision

Squeezing the last bit of life from the Robin Hood metaphor, enter Homes England from stage left, like King Richard in the film's usual final scene. Homes England was not new to the project; it had supported the master plan with revenue funding and had regular engagement with the council on a range of matters. The difference now was it was being asked to purchase Broadmarsh and get involved fully in a complex mixed-use city centre regeneration project.

It is interesting to note how Homes England's role (under its many previous names) has changed over the years. English Partnerships and the Homes and Communities Agency had major urban regeneration projects at their heart, but Homes England (renamed under one of the previous Conservative administrations) had largely been focused on suburban residential delivery. Starting under the Conservative 'Levelling-Up' programme, and continuing under the Labour Government, Homes England's remit was expanded to again include mixed-use regeneration. Using the excellent example of Homes England's recent involvement in York Central (another project JLL is involved in) all parties thought it was worth exploring Homes England's acquisition of Broadmarsh.

JLL was appointed to negotiate the sale on behalf of the council, supporting Beverley Gouveia, the Director of Transport and Planning and her small team at the council.

As with any deal covering nearly 14 acres of a city centre in the UK, there was no shortage of complexity. Again we can gloss over much of it, including the need to protect the ongoing agreement for the NHS to build a new diagnostic centre in part of the former shopping centre (including agreeing how to allow demolition of the shopping centre around

The master plan Image courtesy of BDP

Green Heart with 'standing in this place' statue

a building containing extremely sensitive medical scanning equipment), and the legal team's struggle to define the lease plan for the leaseback of the labyrinthine caves under the site, which also happen to be a scheduled ancient monument.

For information, and allowing any reader to log this time as CPD instead of docudrama, the issue of the caves plan was partly resolved by Mick Suggett, the council's solicitor and team leader for conveyancing, contacting the Land Registry directly to ask it how the plan would need to be provided. This is a service the Land Registry offers to try and ensure that submissions to it are approved and that the ownership position is clear for future generations.

The sale finally completed on 31 March 2025. For all of the talk of public sector delay, it is worth noting that Nottingham City Council issued the s114 notice in November 2023. In the 16 months up to March 2025, it launched the Broadmarsh master plan, carried out an internal delivery options review, opened the Green Heart, progressed the sale of the diagnostic centre to the NHS, and negotiated a complex disposal to Homes England. A huge amount of work delivered on time and on budget, all while still doing the 'day job'.

Homes England is now fully up to speed, putting huge resources behind the management, imminent demolition and upcoming delivery plan for Broadmarsh (re-labelled Broad Marsh by the parties to reflect its historic name pre-shopping centre). The City Council and Homes England are still fully engaged, working under the formal Collaboration Agreement (which JLL also negotiated for the council) and the people of Nottingham can look forward to seeing real progress on the most exciting development in the city in a generation.

The last word goes to Paul Seddon from one of our initial meetings with Homes England, *"Richard III has been great for Leicester. If you happen to find a man buried with a bow during your enabling works that would be very welcome indeed."*

Richard is an honorary member of ACES who was President in 2004/05, a member of ACES Council for a number of years, and a stalwart of Heart of England Branch, both before and after his retirement in 2008. Up to that date he had worked for Nottingham City Council for 35 years.

MY LEGACY What has happened to my legacy – Part two

Richard Allen

This second part of a two-part article ties in a treat (almost as if I'd planned it!) with Phil Farrell's private sector perspective of the Broadmarsh Centre. Richard continues his account of his experiences at Nottingham City Council. Richard also promotes the benefits of ACES membership, especially the opportunity to network.

This second article covers the period from my retirement speech in 2008, up to the present day. It attempts to explain what has happened to the legacy and offers some thoughts on the future.

Back office transformation

Six months after I retired in 2008 came the banking crisis. There were warning signs before my retirement. Silly money was being paid for development land. Developers were buying sites without planning consent, taking more risks than was healthy, and property values tumbled. This presented a great opportunity for the council to modernise its working practices and move staff from several sites to be all under one roof. The concept of agile working in an open plan environment was sold to the staff. It was obvious that there would be less money available and less staff to accommodate. A business case for a move was made: making better use of the council's property assets and expertise was the answer for the future. The 220,000 sq ft state of the art former Capital One building on the edge of the city centre, located just north of the station, became available. It was purchased by the council at a knock down price. Some existing office properties were sold to help finance the move; by 2012 the new office, now known as Loxley House, was up and running. But other offices vacated by the move still remain empty or have been on the market for sale without success.

Loxley house is now much underused due to the reduction in staff numbers and home working. Consultants were appointed to advise on how the council could operate more efficiently and save costs. They recommended staff consolidate into the first two floors and that the other two floors are mothballed. The council decided to adapt the top two floors for letting. It then considered a sale of the building.

I suspect all of this led to the top

Loxley House, Nottingham City Council Headquarters

commissioner overseeing Nottingham saying *'it is blindingly obvious that it has not been making best use of its properties.'* He has now said, though, *'it's difficult to be clear about what the operational estate requirements are ... and judgement needs to be informed by local government reform (LGR)'.* So for the time being the building will be retained. And some staff is even moving back in.

Political ambitions and risk taking

Until relatively recently, from the day I retired the political leadership at the council did not change. However, the chief executive and chief officers changed frequently, including those responsible for its property assets. The revenue support grant was being cut every year; greater demands were being placed on the council's resources to meet the increase in demand-led adult social care, children's services and homelessness costs. The council was living beyond its means.

But the Labour led council still had ambitions for the city. It now had the knowledge and power and was prepared to take risks. The introduction of prudential borrowing in 2006 presented the opportunity to go on a borrowing spree to meet these ambitions. Like a number of other councils, it used these powers to borrow to acquire property investments to replace the revenue support grant cuts. These investments were scrutinised thoroughly to assess risk by a team of in-house estates surveyors, which are generally performing well compared with some other authorities' assets, as is the whole investment property portfolio. Many of the high yielding assets that were reaching the end of their economic and physical life have over recent years been redeveloped or sold. The council is now closing its managed business centres due to the high running costs, seemingly abandoning using property to support the growth of small businesses. This change in focus makes the branding of the investment team estate surveyors as 'Nottingham Property Plus' now misleading and inappropriate. The image needs reviewing and updating.

The council embarked on other less successful commercial ventures, including setting up its own Robin Hood Energy company that went bust owing £36 million. Something the leader of the council at the time has taken full responsibility for.

Broad Marsh and the city centre

Broadmarsh Shopping Centre redevelopment scheme collapses

Around the time of my retirement Stuart Rose, the then Chief Executive of Marks and Spencer, said *'We are delighted to have secured the Westfield sites in Nottingham, Bradford and Stratford'.* With an anchor store signed up it was all looking good for the Broad Marsh scheme. Then came the banking crisis; followed by the rise in online retailing. Westfield decided its mega scheme was no longer viable and a more realistic one was produced for the existing centre, to be anchored by a national upmarket departmental chain store.

A new development agreement was close to being signed when Intu made an offer to buy the leasehold interest that Westfield could not refuse. Intu had always seen the redevelopment of the Broadmarsh centre as a major threat to its Victoria Centre. The services of the national consultants advising the council on the scheme were let go: consultants I had appointed following a very thorough selection process, influenced by discussions between some ACES and private sector delegates after a few drinks in the early hours of an ACES conference.

Without retail specialist advice, the council varied the existing lease terms to benefit Intu and encourage the developer to come up with its own redevelopment scheme. Intu's scheme was a substantial remodelling of the existing centre, incorporating a significant proportion of leisure, including a cinema and ten pin bowling. This meant the council had to pick up the full cost of the new bus station, multi-storey car park, highway works, and various other associated costs: around £50m. The council decided to take a big risk, started and completed this work. Intu started the demolition; then went into receivership. It sold on the Victoria Centre but handed back the lease of the Broadmarsh semi demolished centre to the council, which then went out to wide consultation on the future of the site through the 'Big Conversation'. They were initially persuaded to use the area predominantly as an open space biodiversity area to be known as the 'Green Heart'. Consultants were appointed and a master plan produced which very sensibly reduced the size of the 'Green Heart'. But it originally retained much of the skeleton of the semi demolished centre, including the dangling of greenery from the structure. Not even an original idea for the city; it was done in the Royal Hotel development in the 1980s. A novelty then that only lasted a few years.

Recovery starts

The 'Green Heart', promoted as a nature first wildlife rich green space and some related

Broad Marsh Bus Station: a few passengers and one solitary bus!

highway/pedestrianisation works have now been completed. The streetscape from the rail station is much improved. Peoples College has moved to the Broad Marsh east site where it has developed a new £58m Nottingham College. The council has moved its central library into part of the multi-storey car park building that was allocated for this use. The car park is well used, but by office workers not shoppers. The bus station is under used; visitors to the city catch and alight from buses at more convenient bus stops in the city centre. The shop units included in this development are all still vacant. Nottingham University Hospital Trust has agreed to develop a medical diagnostic centre on part of the site.

Sale to Homes England

After a 'soft' marketing exercise, and given the significant site holding costs and financial constraints the council faces, it concluded a freehold sale to Homes England to be the most viable option. The sale price is reported to have been £8.4m plus VAT. But construction will not begin until 2029/30, then be undertaken in phases with no end stop date. The overall development site sold, now 20 acres, includes Severns House, a former council office that has been vacant and abandoned for around 15 years; the partly demolished former shopping centre; the cleared site west of the Green Heart; a hideous run-down underused NCP multi-story car park, where the council, who is freehold owner of the site, has just agreed terms with NCP for the surrender of the lease; and the former Peoples College site on Maid Marion Way.

The new East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) has awarded a £3.39m grant towards the complete demolition of the site, which will cost around £30m, start in the summer and take a year to complete. This 'de-risking' of the site is aimed at making it attractive to the private sector to deliver the current master plan that is for a mixed use development of around 1,000 homes; 200,000 sq ft of office; commercial and leisure use, and providing 2,000 jobs.

The site is hugely important strategically to the future of Nottingham. It is the gateway to the city centre from London and the south. There is a memorandum of understanding attached to the sale to support the master plan vision. Such agreements are not legally binding, and already there is disagreement as Homes England is proposing more student accommodation which the leader of the council does not want. My years of regeneration experience taught me that the only way to control development is to retain a legal interest in it. Even though Homes England is investing a lot of capital up front, it will be just one of many sites it is promoting throughout the country; not necessarily a priority.

Broad Marsh Master Plan delivery

Will the current master plan-led and freehold sale scheme succeed when the council is giving up its role of 'making things happen' by transferring control and power to the new owner? It will not move Nottingham back up the scale of national top retail destinations: the plan does not include any retail.

The recently completed 'Green Heart', not included in the sale, putting 'marsh' back in the Broad Marsh, has so far been favourably received. Residential development should not be difficult given the new owner. The office, commercial and leisure element will be more problematic: Nottingham does not have the rental values for such developments. To kick start this development, the council could build, opposite the new library, a new landmark headquarters to include a 'one stop shop' for all public services, then sell Loxley House. Presumably this option has been considered and rejected as being unviable: LGR may present an opportunity to reconsider. The site would benefit from some statement architecture to be a major public destination to bind it all together, not just a place for the public to pass through.

Footpath through the 'Green Heart' to the new library and bus station from the city centre

Regeneration timescales in Nottingham

Major brownfield sites in Nottingham have always taken years to complete, often passing through several economic cycles, the hands of various developers, and never

Development site with the 'Green Heart' in the middle

built out to the original master plan vision. The largest development site in Nottingham currently is the Island Quarter to the east of the city centre. It was the flagship project for Nottingham's 'City Challenge', an early 1990s government urban regeneration initiative to revitalise deprived urban areas through public/private partnership working.

I was the property officer on the council's regeneration delivery team. This 36-acre site, former Boots chemical factory, gas station and scrap metal yard, was purchased and cleaned up by the council with the use of substantial European Union funding, then sold onto the private sector for development. Thirty years later, only half of the land is developed. There has been much recent activity on the site with the development of student accommodation. More is planned, plus laboratory space and a hotel. EMCCA has announced a grant of £3m to include some apartment development on the site. I would guess more public funding support will be needed before final completion.

Another City Challenge project, the redevelopment of the former Sneinton wholesale fruit and vegetable market to create a new vibrant and eclectic area for small businesses - intended to be Nottingham's Camden Lock - is only now achieving this vision. This is after the council had to buy back and regain control of the market from the original regeneration specialists it was sold to, inject more public money into the market, and repurpose it, now to be a booming hub for creative and independent businesses. This success is also down partly to the combined enterprise of the tenants, rather than the council, criticised recently for not promoting the market, even though as landlords it benefits financially from the rents.


Island Quarter student accommodation and land still available for development

Sneinton Market

New inner ring road south of the station showing student accommodation and Unity Square, the new Government Hub, in the distance


Robin outside the castle wall

Probable Broad Marsh regeneration final outcome

More public funding will surely be needed for the Broad Marsh, for example, for the remainder of the demolition costs which presumably will now be met by Homes England. The development will also be more market - than master plan - led. My prediction is that the whole area will end up being predominantly all residential, with just a variety of other uses mainly supporting a new 'city village' community; the 'Green Heart' will survive, but not in its current form; and the council will have again built a bus station and shops in the wrong location.

City centre transformation

Since 2008 there have always been cranes on the Nottingham skyline, in almost all cases developing student apartments, much of it fronting the new inner ring road south of the station. More is planned as the two universities aim to boost the student population in the city to 60,000 (1/6 of the city population). The only other developments of scale - other than the start of the Broad Marsh regeneration - are the redevelopment of the station and Unity Square, opposite the station, a state of the art 10-storey 389,000 sq ft tower, now the new Government Hub.

The city centre itself has a rundown appearance due to the number of empty shops, particularly along the two routes into the centre from the Broad Marsh, and increase in rough sleepers. All city centres are now in trouble and are reinventing themselves. Nottingham's centre, already becoming a 'studentopolis', will in the future be an area where more people will live, as well as work and play. It is steeped in history associated with its castle and lace market area. It has some great architecture. Nottingham has Robin Hood: a legend, but one that has gained a special almost magical status around the world [Ed – as Phil pointed out in the previous article].

To transform the fortunes of the city centre on a legend, its history, changing role and character to achieve a 'contemporary and diversified space that captures the spirit of a dynamic and thriving community'; the vision of the Nottingham's Economic Plan for Growth 2024 -30, will inevitably take some time.

Property team break up and loss of knowledge and power

There has undoubtedly been a huge power shift at Nottingham, from the officers to the politicians. Very few of my property team is left. There has been a damaging loss of in-house knowledge and expertise. The property team is now dependant on the use of consultants and agency staff. The Head of Property is only a third tier officer. During my last years I had regular meetings with the labour leadership on property. Often the property service manager attended as well. Two voices conveying the same message is better than one. By having the knowledge and experience we had the trust and respect of the leader and deputy. Demonstrating old public servant values of loyalty and commitment to the city over many years helped. We were considered to be a safe pair of hands for our property role; though unpopular when appearing to block progress, particularly when politicians, and even officers, wanted to give away assets for pet projects or take unacceptable risks [Ed – well said Richard].

Nottingham's financial bailout by its property portfolio: the family silver

The council is in dire straits with its revenue budget, now moved from 'terminal to critical'

It is selling £100 million worth of its property assets to address the budget deficit. This sales programme will have an impact on its overall portfolio worth over a £1bn; but only really tarnish the 'family silver'. Although cash poor, the council will continue to be asset rich. It will also benefit from the prudent in-house estate management of the past creating 'clawback' provisions in sales, future opportunities for lease re-gearings, ransom strip payments and payments for the release of rebuilding clauses in many ground leases. Just before I retired, the council sold Tollerton Airport. A planning application is just about to be submitted for the first phase of development on a site with the potential to provide 4,000 homes. The sale by the council included a 'clawback' clause under which the council will receive 50% of the uplift in value for development.

Some thoughts on the future

<u>Need for an estate strategy</u>

In the future there is likely to be fewer, but larger, single tier local authorities delivering a much reduced range of services. Working smarter and sweating the property assets will be demanded. To be successful, property must be high on the agenda: strong leadership will be required. It should raise the profile of the chief estate surveyor who should take the lead.

The job specification for the Head of Property at Nottingham requires the post holder to lead the property function and prepare and maintain the corporate property strategy. So far as I can see, one has never been written. The council has continued to produce asset management plans (AMPs) that set out the process of how assets are to be managed and maintained. They provide for regular condition surveys which significantly help in keeping premises safe while the repairs backlog is still high. But AMPs are not an estate strategy setting out how property will be used to support service delivery and regeneration. Central government departments were not required to produce AMPs before the banking crisis. After the crisis they went straight to a simple clear six page 'estate strategy' with just three objectives: to modernise, rationalise and support the growth agenda, a much better more focused approach that should be adopted across the whole of the public sector. The strategy will also need to set out how it is to be delivered: as a minimum by a professional strategic and intelligent client in house team; finance that is determined by references to the 'time, quality and cost' test, and of course the appropriate use of AI.

Prospects for future chief estate surveyors

I hope the current Head of Property at Nottingham will be successful. The recently appointed incumbent has the benefit of a good number of years' experience at Nottingham and has worked in the private sector. But it is a 'big ask' for someone operating at third tier level, without direct access to both the political and chief officer leadership group.

Working in the public sector is like playing a long game. To survive you need to know the rules and stay ahead of the game. Over the years much knowledge and expertise has been lost at Nottingham and other local authorities. The public sector has become dependent on consultants who know the game rules. They now have the power, knowledge and resources. Communication is completely out of control. There is just far too much of it in the digital world. Even with the introduction of AI, for the foreseeable future, the situation will not change. Chief estate surveyors, under whatever title they operate, will not have the in-house knowledge and support of the past. To survive and deliver, even a basic intelligent client role, they will need to 'share knowledge and experience'. **Networking will be essential: just what ACES facilitates for its members.**

Tollerton Airport site

Kevin is Head of Property and Asset Management at Worcester City Council and Secretary of Heart of England Branch.

LA INTERVENTION, WORCESTER

Local authority town centre intervention – Worcester Arches final phase

Kevin Moore BSc MSc FRICS

Kevin outlines an imaginative regeneration project which certainly proved complex and challenging. With a successful outcome, it illustrates the impact a proactive council can make. Moreover, it illustrates the satisfying aspects of a career for a public sector chartered surveyor.

56 Foregate Street

The ambition

It had been a longstanding ambition to provide better connections between the commercial core of Worcester City Centre and River Severn. A proposal for the demolition of 56 Foregate Street situated opposite the busy Foregate Street Railway Station was included in the 2019 City Centre Master Plan. The demolition of this property would be the final link of a direct through route for pedestrians and cyclists between the station and riverside parks, the racecourse and university campuses. The route runs parallel to the railway viaduct housing a variety of businesses in its arches, traditional arch uses such as motor vehicle repairs and storage, but now a burgeoning destination for new restaurants and bars. The historic route was effectively "stopped up" in 1964 by the building of 56 Foregate Street under the terms of a 99-year ground lease granted by the British Railways Board.

The project

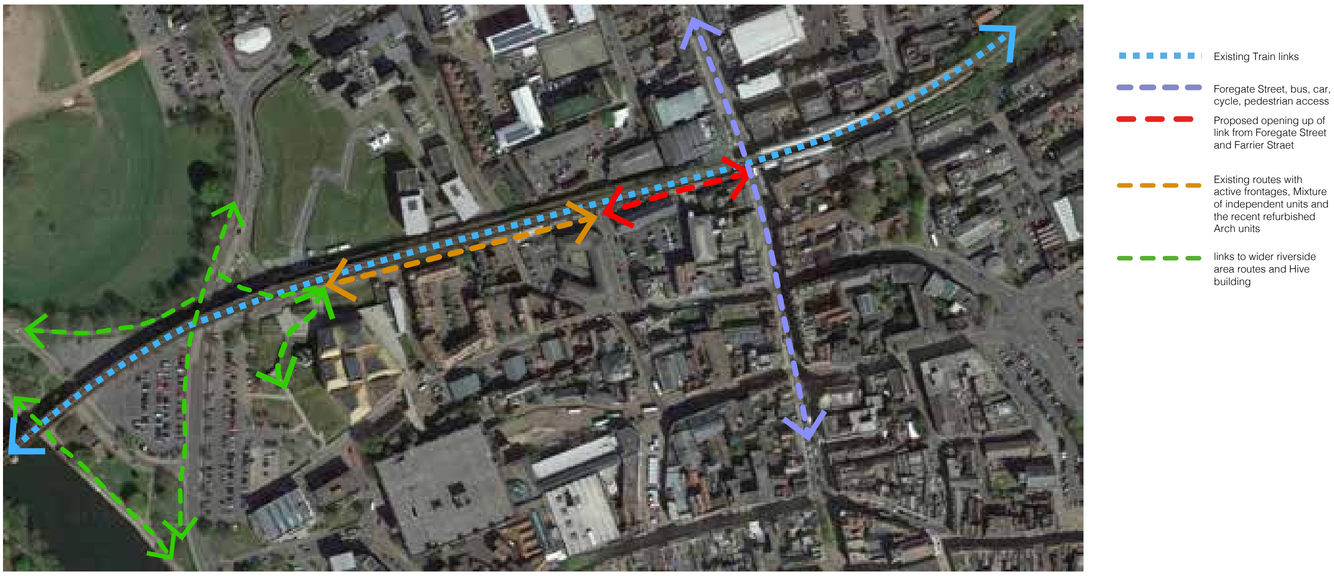
In 2018, the City Council led a consortium of parties including the university, Network Rail and various arts organisations to submit a proposal to the Arts Council for funding from its Cultural Development Fund (CDF). A programme of projects would see the refurbishment of 7 arches for arts and creative uses, festivals and the opening up of the route to the riverside with new public realm. A funding agreement was signed in 2019 and the first phase of 5 refurbished arches for arts and creative uses completed

Arches completed Phase of works

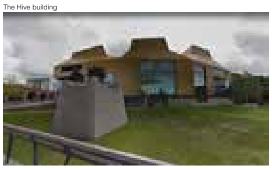
Netherton Court route businesses

Cherry Tree Walk businesses

Foregate street station with bus, taxi, pedestrian, cycle links to City Centre



The Hive building



View from proposed link formed to Foregate street down CHerry Tree Walk towards River

View up proposed link to Foregate street, 56 Foregate Street visible at end

and fully occupied in 2023. The City Council took a sublease from the university of these arches for the 7-year period required by the funding agreement and has sublet four arches on affordable terms, one arch available for hire.

The stakeholder agreement that supported the CDF funding bid envisaged that Network Rail and its leaseholder Darvist (a privately owned property company) would find it mutually beneficial to reach agreement on the surrender of 56 Foregate Street.

As most readers will be aware, Network Rail transferred its national portfolio of railway arches into its joint venture, The Arch Company ("ArchCo") in 2019. So, the make up of property interests in 56 Foregate Street was now:

- Freehold: Network Rail
- Long leaseholder: ArchCo, 125 years
- Sub-long leaseholder: Darvist, holding a 99-year lease from 1964 that also included nos 54 and 55 Foregate Street, arches 62, 63 and 64 and the shared roadway from Farrier Street in the demise
- Sub-tenancy: JAQS (fried chicken takeaway) franchisee held on a 10-year lease at a rental of £17,500 pa.

The Arts Council grant ostensibly provided for the purchase of the sub-tenancy but on this basis of the stakeholder agreement between Network Rail and Darvist, there was nothing for the acquisition of the superior interests.

The Cultural Development Fund deadline of 31 March 2023 (extended from 2022 due to Covid) for the council to complete and claim grant was looming without any progress in securing control of the property, let alone its tricky demolition adjacent to an operational railway.

Negotiations

Negotiations had got underway to purchase the subtenancy and compensate for the loss of the business, but reaching final settlement and paying the landlord rent for a vacant property was something the council had been anxious to avoid.

Negotiations were also coloured by the absence of any formal accounts, a lease that had been drawn up by the landlord without any legal qualifications, and the zero star Environmental Health score. Nevertheless, a settlement of £50,000 plus £7,500 for fixtures and fittings was agreed, the tenant being keen to complete due to closure now enforced by Covid rather than an Environmental Health Officer, and the council agreeing to do so on the basis that it recognised the hardship delaying matters would cause, and this would also be an opportunity of closing the deal which may not have arisen once the superior interests had been secured. This was something of a "horse deal", with some robust justification very far removed from a careful analysis of annual net profit and the use of an appropriate multiplier.

It's been quite some time since I've done a total extinguishment of goodwill claim and I was interested to note as part of my research that what was the usual Lands Tribunal multiplier of around 3 appears to have been superseded by far higher years purchase.

Negotiations between Darvist and ArchCo were proceeding extremely slowly, and it appeared that there was little prospect of agreement between these parties. ArchCo was taking a very commercial approach and saw little incentive to agree, despite the seemingly obvious increase in footfall past their arches which would surely stem from the project at other parties' cost.

The structure of the 1964 lease held by Darvist was not helpful or straightforward to deal with. It included other properties and the rent was calculated by reference to a formula that in effect provided a base ground rent plus a 50:50 share of the rack rent, assessed annually by reference to rents receivable in the previous year.

Any compulsory purchase action was ruled out: any CPO would draw an inevitable objection from Network Rail as a statutory objector, though no operational land was actually affected.

Tentative discussions were held with Darvist to sound out its interest in selling the whole ground lease to the council. With under 45 years left, this was a depreciating asset, but the council had to be proactive and not put the success of the scheme at risk. Terms were agreed, financed by prudential borrowing, on the strength of rental income from the ground floor retail units and first and second floors over at 54 and 55 Foregate Street.

The acquisition also secured the first 3 railway arches in from Foregate Street. Arch 62 provided access to the rear of nos 54 and 55, and arches 63 and 64, though inaccessible at present, would be available following the demolition of no 56. Acquisition also meant of course that the subtenancy merged and that the council was no longer paying rent for no 56.

The acquisition of the Darvist lease was completed in 2022 but negotiations progressed still too slowly with Arch Co to obtain landlord's consent to demolish no 56. Arch Co wanted full compensation for loss of its share of rental income from no 56. The company was not prepared to recognise any longer term improvement in rental value of its arches due to the scheme and was also unwilling, or unable under the terms of the JV lease, to extend the council's lease.

Conscious of looming deadlines, the council accepted a deal that comprised of compensation for Arch Co for the loss of rental income arising out of the demolition of no 56, the surrender of arches 63 and 64, and new rental clauses for 54 and 55 providing for a fixed rent based on approximately 50% of the open market rental value, subject to 5 yearly reviews. User clauses were modernised to allow Use Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) high street uses including hot food takeaway and bar, both of which fell outside the existing user provisions The council would also take back arches 63 and 64 for 5 years at a peppercorn rent, to provide 2 more arches for art and creative uses, in compliance with Arts Council CDF obligations.

Demolition

Meanwhile, the procurement of a demolition contractor and all technical/ other consents were pursued.

The West Midlands Procure Partnerships Framework was used for a mini competition to its pre-approved demolition contractors, shortlisted on the basis of previous experience of liaising with Network Rail over similar jobs.

Party Wall Awards were required with the adjoining owners either side. Network Rail, as the building was attached in part to the viaduct, and the freeholder, and those with tenancies in 57 Foregate Street, a 3 storey Listed Georgian property with an employment agency on ground floor and 6 flats on the upper parts and an Airbnb apartment at the rear. The owner was supportive of the scheme and the council agreed to compensate him for keeping the Airbnb apartment vacant during the noisier periods of the demolition.

Once the council had acquired the fried chicken takeaway business, the opportunity had been taken to survey the building, and as far as possible, remove all identified asbestos-containing materials and soft strip the interior to de-risk and expedite the demolition once a contract was awarded. Investigations had confirmed that no 56 was not attached to no 57 and did not share a party wall and the surveyor's award principally dealt with matters of making good and pointing as necessary once the building was taken down, to ensure the exposed wall was weather proofed.

Planning permission ie conservation area consent for the demolition was obtained in 2023.

So, the deal with Arch Co required 5 separate legal documents:

1. Agreement for Lease and Surrender, which was conditional on the completion of the works and the payment of the agreed compensation to ArchCo
2. Licence to Alter, which was conditional on the council obtaining planning permission, Network Rail consents under a Basic Asset Protection Agreement, party wall consents and ArchCo consents to the further detail required in drawings originally submitted, as well as to method statements
3. Deed of Surrender, of arches 63 and 64
4. New Lease, of arches 63 and 64
5. 5Deed of Variation, revising the rental and user clauses in the council's lease.

Network Rail

It was always known that the demolition of the building would require a line closure from Network Rail, perhaps even a series of short weekend line closures which would impede demolition progress and add greatly to the cost of the project. The difficulty of knowing when these line closures would be acceptable to Network Rail also added to the uncertainty of being able to provide a confident end date to the council's funders and stakeholders.

In the event, we were fortunate to have selected a pro-active demolition contractor and to deal with an engineering team at Network Rail happy to come up with a pragmatic way forward. Only two short line closures were required, each of no more than 7 hours after midnight in the early hours of a Sunday. The first allowed the scaffolding already erected to first floor height to be taken above the adjacent viaduct parapet level, and the building securely hoarded from the railway. And the second to allow this scaffolding to be taken down once the second floor of the building had been removed.

It was accepted that the route to Farrier Street would not become adopted highway: the council only has a leasehold interest and Network Rail in any event was not willing to cede ultimate control. The council has to manage this space as the landowner in possession, and has set up a parking enforcement scheme to deter drop offs and collections for the railway station and shoppers parking.

The works

Once the building had been demolished, the first 10 metres of the walkway were paved in matching stone from the same batch of slabs which paved the footway to Foregate Street under the council's Future High Street Fund programme. The remainder of the route has made good with a new tarmacadam surface and street lighting installed on the face of the viaduct. Electricity and water services have

New link after demolition of no 56

been laid to serve arches 62 and 64; the hoarding to arch 63 has been decorated with a place map with images of town centre buildings and personalities in the "Worcester" palette of colours (as close as possible to Lee and Perrins orange without infringing copyright).

The hoardings were removed on 17 February 2025 and with little need for signposting the route has been extremely well used by pedestrians and cyclists alike heading for the river, racecourse, the university, or the bars and restaurants in the arches.

Final thoughts

This project has been one of the most rewarding in my time at Worcester City Council. From a property manager's point of view, it's had a bit of everything - project management, negotiation of the acquisition of property interests, renegotiation of leases, dealing with adjoining owners, construction procurement, placemaking and heritage.

The council has been bold to do so much at risk and the town centre now reaps the reward.

Jemma is an Associate Director working across Boyer's Bristol and Cardiff offices and supports both offices on a variety of projects. Jemma is a chartered planner with over 15 years' experience of working in the private sector, working on projects across the country. Projects include residential, retail led mixed use and commercial schemes, including the preparation and co-ordination of Environmental Impact Assessments and where relevant, retail advice.

LOCAL AUTHORITY TRADING COMPANIES

Back to the Future? The challenge of building like it's 1977

Jemma Shorrock jemmashorrock@boyerplanning.co.uk

Jemma outlines the challenge and says" Without a stronger partnership between public and private sectors and capacity within local authorities to take a more active role in development, the number of homes delivered will remain stubbornly below target." Councils must be empowered to play a more active role in development per se.

Challenging targets?

To meet its 1.5 million homes target, a new impetus is clearly required. To meet its manifesto promise, the government must deliver in excess of 300,000 homes p.a. Yet according to the HBF just 39,170 new homes were given planning approval in England during Q1 2025 - the lowest number of quarterly approvals since 2012 and the third lowest since the data set was started in 2006. This represents a 55% drop on the previous quarter and a 32% drop on Q1 2024, which is clearly unsustainable.

Britain hasn't delivered in excess of 300,000 homes p.a. for almost half a century. In 1977, Britain delivered over 300,000 new homes - a benchmark that successive governments have failed to reach since. Much has changed in that time, but the most consequential shift is that back then, local authorities accounted for nearly half of all new homes, whereas today those figures are negligible.

Private developers have, on the whole, held their output steady despite recessions and changing political tides. But it is not possible to return to the volumes of the 1970s without restoring some form of public-sector-led delivery to the system.

The £39bn now earmarked for affordable housing, while a significant step in the right direction, is only part of the solution. Without a stronger partnership between public and private sectors and capacity within local authorities to take a more active role in development, the number of homes delivered will remain stubbornly below target.

Can local authority trading companies bridge the gap?

Technically, local authority trading companies (LATCs) provide a means to do just that: to give councils a mechanism for more direct involvement in development while retaining a degree of commercial freedom.

Enabled by the Localism Act 2011 and shaped by the Teckal exemption, which permits councils to set up trading companies exempt from public procurement rules, LATCs have become more commonplace, going some way to replace old-fashioned council housing. By 2018, there were 743 LATCs across England, Scotland and Wales, of which nearly a quarter focused on property and investment.

The logic is appealing. LATCs provide councils with greater strategic control than third-party arrangements, enable more agile decision-making than traditional council structures, and create opportunities to reinvest profits into local services. They can also allow councils to step back into housing delivery without the political and financial exposure that accompanies direct development.

The structure has had its successes, demonstrating that councils can act as developers and landlords, often unlocking difficult sites and cross-subsidising affordable housing. But limitations are also becoming increasingly apparent.

A promising tool - but not a silver bullet

LATCs are not, in themselves, a panacea. Many have struggled with governance, transparency and viability. Others have fallen short of their housing delivery objectives due to resourcing and market conditions.

A 2024 report by UNISON, Trading Places, highlights the pressures that LATCs place on council staff, particularly in creating a two-tier workforce with differing pay and pension rights. This not only raises questions around equal pay but also undermines morale and recruitment in a sector already under strain.

Equally significant are the wider systemic constraints. LATCs still face the same planning bottlenecks as any other developer. Without access to sufficient planning officers and technical consultees, projects stall. And the viability challenges facing the sector - high costs, slow sales rates and uncertainty around demand - affect local authority ventures just as much as PLC housebuilders.

And the dip in private sales activity is felt across the development sector. According to Savills' England's Housing Challenge, new build sales reported by PLC housebuilders in 2024 stand at 0.6 sales per outlet per week, still 15% down on pre-pandemic norms. Unless there is a clear and sustained improvement in demand, housebuilders - whether public or private - will hesitate to ramp up delivery.

Funding the homes - but not the machine

The recent Spending Review provided a welcome boost for affordable housing, with £39bn allocated over the next decade. But while the funding is substantial, it overlooks a critical component: the machinery of delivery.

Florence Eshalomi MP, Chair of the cross-party Housing Committee, summed it up clearly in her recent open letter to the Chancellor: meeting the 1.5m homes target requires not just money for homes, but a "generational increase" in public sector capacity. That includes planning officers, land assembly skills, and local authority teams able to drive projects forward.

A new public-private compact

To build like the 1970s, we do not need to replicate the era's institutions wholesale. We need a model that reflects today's economic and social realities, but which restores a balance between public purpose and private delivery.

That means empowering councils to play a more active role in development - whether through LATCs, joint ventures, or partnerships with housing associations and developers. But it also means recognising that councils cannot deliver alone.

A coordinated approach between the public and private sector is essential. From identifying land, to co-designing masterplans, navigating planning and funding infrastructure, early-stage collaboration must become the norm. Too often, the public and private sectors operate in parallel, despite there being clear benefits of early integration.

Solving the capacity crisis

Of all the bottlenecks in the system, the shortage of planning officers is perhaps the most damaging. The Planning Officers Society and the RTPI have repeatedly warned that under-resourced planning departments are a serious risk to national housing ambitions.

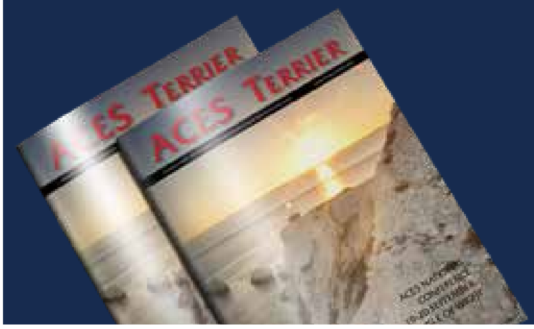
The government has acknowledged this in pledging increased funding for council budgets, but again, funding is only part of the solution. A report from the Home Builders Federation shows that 80% of local planning authorities are operating below full capacity, with many unable to keep up with the rising demand for housing applications. Without a targeted effort to attract, train and retain planning officers, the additional housing funds will remain theoretical; applications will pile up; good schemes will stall; housing commencements will fall, rather than rise.

So the government must both fund and otherwise incentivise the front line.

Looking forwards, not backwards

The ambition to return to 1970s-level output is commendable. But achieving it means more than restoring the public sector's role in housing. It means rethinking how the public and private sectors work together.

If we want to build like it's 1977, we must move beyond structures and towards substance, investing in the planners, officers and partners who can make delivery happen.



ACES

The Terrier
ACES Secretary: Trevor Bishop MRICS
07853 262255 - secretary@aces.org.uk
ACES Editor: Betty Albon editor@aces.org.uk

LEGACY HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

The future of legacy-inspired developments

Johnny Clayton and James Cordery Johnny.Clayton@carterjonas.co.uk
James.Cordery@carterjonas.co.uk

Johnny and James are both involved in projects for which the central objective is the concept of landowner legacy. Here, they consider its future direction and influence."

Origins

The concept of legacy in new communities was conceived and developed by The Prince's Foundation (now The King's Foundation) and first put into practice on the then Prince's own land – initially at Poundbury and more latterly Nansledan and in a range of other projects throughout the UK.

Now as its founder's duties have expanded considerably, will the legacy movement continue to evolve, and how?

Legacy has become an umbrella term which touches on a variety of aspects relating to the delivery of a development. What differentiates a 'legacy' scheme is a clearly defined core of objectives which help underscore quality. These can be wide-ranging – for example achieving a high level of biodiversity net gain, community value and active travel.

Another important characteristic of such schemes is that these principles are embedded early on. Because the impact of legacy is so integral to sense of place and the quality of the scheme as a whole - especially the public realm – it is fundamental at the masterplanning stages.

Many early legacy schemes took their objectives directly from guidance produced by The Prince's Foundation. But landowners' objectives are inevitably diverse and so too are the opportunities and limitations within any one legacy-

Johnny joined Carter Jonas in 2018 to head up the masterplanning and urban design practice across the UK. Johnny is a masterplanner and urban designer, with a broad skills base and over 16 years of project experience encompassing conceptual design, masterplanning, urban design, detailed design and project implementation. His particular specialism and passion is for strategic land projects including new settlements, but also urban mixed-use regeneration schemes. Johnny is also a Chartered Landscape Architect.

James is a development partner in Carter Jonas' Oxford office and advises landowners on navigating the challenging process of strategic planning.

Poundbury

inspired development. Consequently Carter Jonas works with landowners to create a bespoke set of objectives for each scheme.

"For the last twenty years, much of my work has been what would be referred to as 'legacy' schemes," says Johnny. "Earlier on they tended to be major regeneration schemes on land owned by landed estates in major UK cities including London and Birmingham. But more recently this has extended geographically."

So how is legacy embedded in this instance? There's a focus on quality in the very early stages. At the masterplanning stage, we have provided substantial detail on the townscape and the way in which vernacular styles of architecture are maintained on the new development. There has also been a greater focus than usual on how appropriate levels of density can be achieved.

Throughout the process, Johnny's team works closely with the landowner, land promotor and developer. In many cases, the landowner will continue to be involved as the leaseholder, so will remain responsible for the maintenance of the new community.

Value added

James' work in the context of legacy has been both as a valuer and as an agent. As such, he sees the application of legacy principles from the point of view of the landowner.

"The legacy approach enables landowner to create a development, often on their own doorstep, which they are proud of, and which is an investment in the local community; but added to that, legacy-inspired schemes provide added value. The financial return may be delayed because of the detail that's required at an early stage, but ultimately a higher quality scheme will be created and this will invariably attract a higher price.

"It's also a facilitator. I'm currently working with a private landowner who is looking to maximise value from a site, but it's constrained by the fact that it's located within an AONB. Often a scheme in this location wouldn't get planning consent, but the chances will be substantially increased by the development being community-led and design-led. From a completely cynical point of view, legacy can be used as risk mitigation.

"Similarly in my work with St Modwen in Wantage, I've seen how increased value invested in placemaking from the early stages of development has been fundamental to increased profit – both for the landowner and the developer."

While the preconceived idea of legacy-led schemes tends to be one of tradition – something that has (specifically in the context of Poundbury) been criticised as pastiche. But St Modwen's work dispels that image: these are modern homes in a modern context. What differentiates them from other new developments is the quality, not only of placemaking, but of design and materials.

But communities such as these are unquestionably the product of the ideas that led to Poundbury and other early examples.

"The work of The Prince's Foundation has been fundamental in defining legacy and establishing an initial set of principles," says Johnny. "But inevitably legacy is evolving and as it expands the principles have to adapt.

"Many developers have benefited from the site-specific design and building manual which was created for Poundbury, but its starting point was a very thorough assessment of the existing location which the new development took inspiration from. That only really works on a scheme attached to an existing historic town or village."

It is clear that schemes established on legacy principles invariably deliver quality schemes. But is this the direction in which all new developments are heading? James and Johnny agree that the legacy movement is grow in popularity, and increasingly so as schemes such as Winterbourne Fields come to fruition.

Iain joined Graham + Sibbald in May 2025 as Business Development Director. His remit is to drive the growth of the business across the UK as a whole with a strong focus on the public sector."

HOUSING CASE STUDY, GERMANY

Local authority residential development in Germany: A case study for the UK?

Iain Mulvey iain.mulvey@g-s.co.uk

Iain here outlines an imaginative scheme by a local authority in Germany which addresses housing issues similar to our own. "The [LA] development company is unapologetic about capturing the developer's profit". Would the model work in the UK?

Background

Germany, like the UK, has a housing issue. Many of those issues are shared, such as increased inflation caused by the war in Ukraine, higher interest rates compared to the post-global financial crisis period, and political and legislative challenges. In the case of Germany, there is a view that there is now over-regulation- in terms of building quality standards around fire safety and environmental compliance in particular. The belief is that this has fuelled higher pricing due to the impact of those standards. The comparison is often made to the neighbouring Netherlands, where looser building regulations mean cheaper development costs and therefore land values and ultimately end cost to homeowners.

In order to combat those challenges, some local development corporations (wirtschaftsfoerderungen) have elected to turn into developers themselves, rather like some local authorities in the UK who have created housing development vehicles.

LA case study: Alfter, near Bonn

In one example, the enterprising town of Alfter just four miles outside the former capital of West Germany, Bonn, has created its own development company to bring forward a residential led development, to provide more housing for its 25,000 inhabitants. By comparison, in a UK context, Alfter is similar in population size to towns such as Berkhamstead, Godalming, Ormskirk or Frome.

The political landscape in the neighbouring city of Bonn has changed as part of an overall change in sentiment towards housing and the environment, meaning that future housing supply will now need to be of much higher density. Land values have increased substantially in the Bonn region, in comparison to Alfter and the wider surrounding areas. As a result, the entrepreneurial Mayor of Alfter decided to intervene and create a housing company which is delivering single family units of around 160 sq m set in plots of 475 sq m. This will provide family housing at a much lower density than surrounding regions, and at more affordable levels than in more urban areas and critically, is geared towards the needs of local communities.

The council development corporation began by acquiring rural land just outside the town from private landowners, to assemble a site. It is important to note that this is not a town where there is 'market failure'. As part of the agreement with the town council, the development company has borrowed €20.0m from the private market. That loan has the local authority as guarantor for the repayments, and in turn charges the development company a premium of 1.00% on top of

the agreed interest rate for the loan. This has allowed the development company to create serviced plots for single family housing and a number of blocks which will be sold to housebuilders. In all, this will provide around 400 new homes in Alfter.

The assembly cost for the serviced plots is €320.0 sq m and they are selling at €540.0 sq m – crucially with the development company retaining the profits to use to repay the infrastructure loan or fund future schemes.

For each plot sold to the public, applicants are required to complete an online questionnaire to assess their suitability. This creates a score which allows them to rank the applicants in case of over-subscription, which was the case of the initial rounds of development. The criteria were selected by the local government and two routes were available: one gave preference to applicants with commitment in the field of sustainability (e.g. building with renewable building material or greater carbon reduction plans); the other preferred local citizens with lower levels of income. This was scored on a number of criteria based around need, including where the applicant lived, and awarded more points to those who planned to build houses with PV, battery or other sustainability measures. If selected, the applicant could then secure private finance to build the house, with the development company providing a development monitoring role to ensure that the standards the applicant was contracted to deliver were met.

Since its commencement in summer 2024, approximately two thirds of the land is already sold, with further phases ongoing and construction in progress (building permission takes approximately 6 months) and the first new owners are already moving in.

Conclusion

A lot has been made of the UK government's target to build 300,000 homes a year and the likely inability of the market (both public and private) to meet that need. The interesting thing about this German example is that at a very local level, authorities can be proactive in their approach. The development company is unapologetic about capturing the developer's profit, not frightened by borrowing private sector money in order to achieve its aims, and also has the needs of its local community in mind, as well as commitment to its sustainability aims.

Clearly we have a more challenging landscape around planning and land assembly/CPO which may elongate a similar process and increase costs. I imagine the private market may have a strong opinion if local authorities started undertaking direct development in locations where there was no market failure. It certainly did when local authorities started out-competing investors to buy income-producing assets through using what they deemed to be preferential borrowing rates via the Public Works Loan Board.

Nevertheless, unless we change something, it is generally accepted that the 300,000 target will not be achieved. On that basis, we should look carefully at the routes being undertaken elsewhere, especially where the public sector is taking the initiative. Hopefully, we can then learn from that best practice as part of the solution to the issue that does not appear to be going away any time soon.

Andy has worked in the private rented sector for over 25 years and joined Leaders Romans Group from his previous role at Greystones Management Consultancy where he advised clients on property investments across the UK. He has experience dealing with all property services, from lettings to managing and disposing of large scale institutional owned property portfolios. Previously, Andy was Managing Director of Allsop Letting & Management, where he focused on delivering change programmes.

PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS

Will Labour change permitted development rights?

Andy Jones ACJones@lrg.co.uk

Andy discusses potential implications for property investment: "PDR offers a streamlined, cost-effective approach that enhances the profitability and scalability of medium to large-scale property investment strategies."

Fast-tracking housing units

The use of Permitted Development Rights (PDR) to enable change of use from commercial (or other) uses to residential is essentially a policy of the previous government. Following the introduction of this fast-track option for the creation of new housing units in 2013, the uptake has been considerable. Between 2015/16 and 2022/23, 102,830 new homes were delivered through change-of-use PDRs according to government figures. The vast majority of these homes (89%) were created through the conversion of offices and other commercial, business and retail units, and new homes created through change-of-use PDRs made up around 6% of the net additional homes delivered between 2015/16 and 2022/23.

PDR is extremely popular with investors: these rights allow certain types of property development or changes of use to proceed without the need for full planning permission. This streamlines the development process, saving time, reducing bureaucratic delays, and lowering associated costs. Essentially, PDR offers a streamlined, cost-effective approach that enhances the profitability and scalability of medium to large-scale property investment strategies.

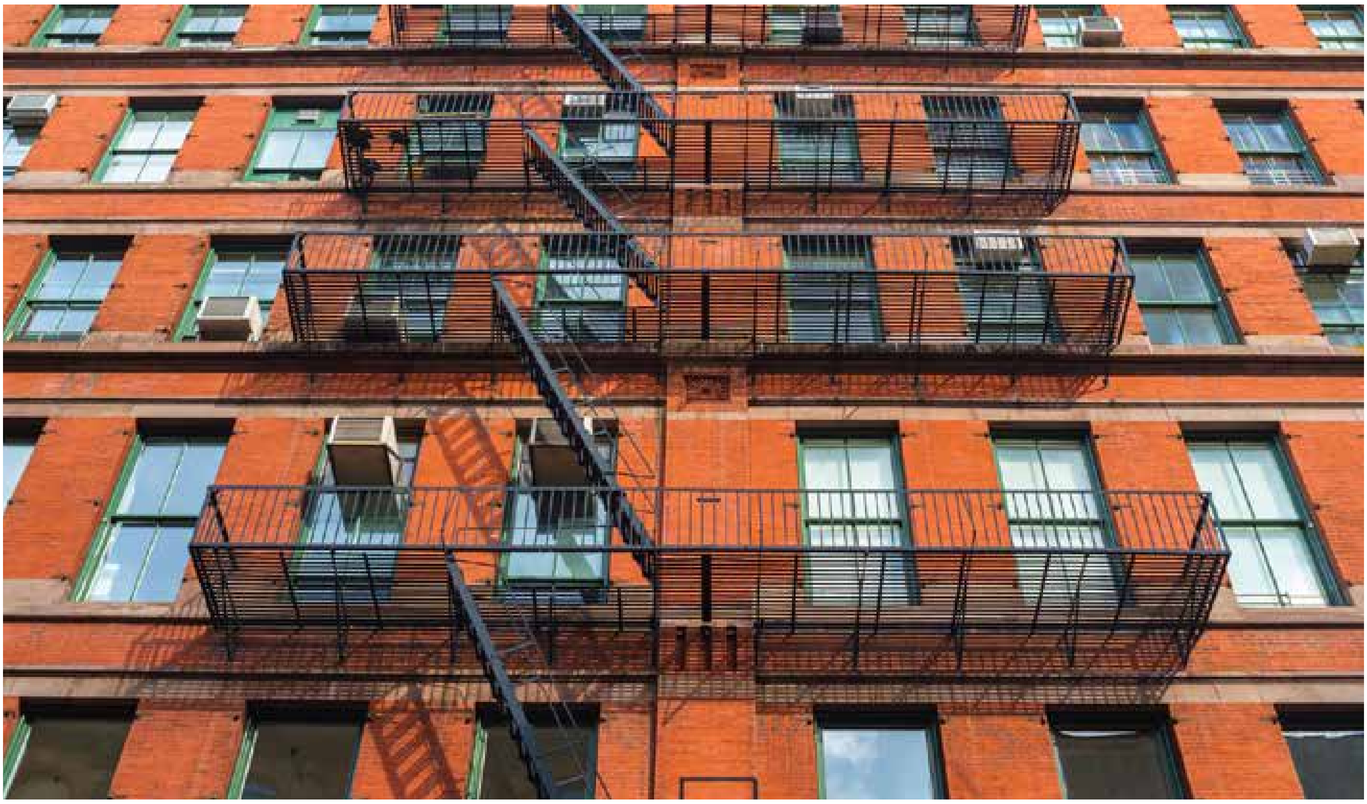
Will any of this change under the Labour government? Labour has historically been critical of PDR, citing concerns over housing quality, local authority oversight, and the broader impact on communities.

However, it seems likely, given what we know of government planning policy to date: to meet the extreme housing need and the government's own ambitious housing targets (which Keir Starmer himself has referred to as 'an almighty challenge') the government will need to use every tool in its toolbox. On this I anticipated that permitted development rights will not only be retained, but strengthened. In fact in January, the government launched a consultation on broadening the scope of rural PDR .

It may be that rather than scrapping this very lucrative source of housing delivery, the government looks to address quality concerns which have been well-aired in the media. For example, we may see changes in regulation to raise standards, but essentially, I see a leveraging of PDR to deliver more housing.

Potential quality improvements?

While Labour has not yet published formal proposals regarding PDR, several



scenarios are being speculated within the industry. These include the possibility of mandatory quality standards for PDR conversions; potentially more power to local authorities through enhanced Article 4 Directions or other mechanisms requiring local approval for PDR schemes; increasing the requirement for affordable housing in any new scheme, and an increase in sustainability and affordability requirements. While far from certain, these potential changes align with Labour's broader focus on housing quality, community empowerment and sustainable development.

In the meantime, from the small-scale, often amateur landlord – perhaps someone who has inherited a property or has a unit surplus to requirements – to major investors, PDR can result in an excellent return on investment. Any restrictions or rollbacks could fundamentally alter the economics of an investment. Securing opportunities sooner rather than later under the existing framework may pay off for a variety of reasons.

Property professionals must remain agile and stay informed. Crucial key steps include engaging professional consultants and legal experts to understand the nuances of local authority attitudes toward PDRs. This will better enable investors to be familiar with any changing policies, also to anticipate changes and adapt strategies accordingly.

Alan is a Senior Architectural Technician in Boyer's Design team based in Wokingham. His experience spans over 19 years in residential architecture, varying from one-off houses to large developments of up to 700 units. He is currently involved in a wide range of projects, from a major brownfield regeneration site to numerous infill developments across England.

FUTURE HOMES STANDARD

The future of the Future Homes Standard

Alan Wright AlanWright@boyerplanning.co.uk

Alan gives a professional insight and personal experience from his work role, and practical information from adapting his own home to improve energy efficiency: "The success of the FHS depends on a shared commitment to building better homes."

The housebuilding sector will see considerable change if, as intended by the previous government, changes are made to replace the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) with the Future Homes Standard (FHS).

With every indication that the government intends to roll out this change, it is interesting to consider its wide-ranging impact. I can volunteer a broad perspective as I both design homes as a profession and have also undertaken what might be described as an experiment, to adapt my 1970s house to meet the energy efficiency ratings demanded by the Future Homes Standard.

Understanding the challenge

As an initiative to increase energy efficiency, the FHS is very welcome. However, concerns have been raised, particularly regarding the Home Energy Model (HEM), a computer programme designed to assess a building's energy efficiency in place of the SAP.

The pros and cons of change

The proposed changes aim to improve the accuracy and relevance of energy assessments. A more robust method could drive innovation in design and technology, creating greater energy efficiency. It could also create a level playing field for developers.

However, there are potential drawbacks. Developing and implementing a new method is complex and time-consuming which could lead to uncertainty, as developers and building control bodies adapt to new requirements. At the heart of the issue, concerns have been raised, not least by the Home Builders Federation, about the HEM's accuracy and reliability. If the model overestimates energy consumption, it could lead to unnecessary costs and delays for developers, ultimately impacting the price of new homes; if it underestimates consumption the environmental benefits would be lower.

Finding the right balance

It is essential to find a balance between environmental ambitions and practical considerations. Overly stringent regulations could stifle innovation and increase the cost of housing, hindering the delivery of affordable housing.

It is crucial that the government works closely with the industry to develop a realistic and achievable FHS. This includes ensuring that the assessment methodology is accurate, reliable and cost-effective. As an architectural technologist, I believe we have a vital role in shaping the future of housing, by embracing new technologies and design principles, to ensure that new homes are not only carbon neutral but also affordable and desirable. The success of the FHS depends on a shared commitment to building better homes. By addressing the concerns of the industry, the government has the opportunity to create a legacy of energy-efficient and sustainable housing for generations to come.

Home project

My personal experience highlights the potential for older homes to meet these standards.

I began my 'experiment' in the fortunate position of qualifying for a £10,000 Green Homes Grant because my wife and I are both deaf. This enabled us to purchase and fit an air source heat pump (which, at £10,000 is £7,000 more expensive than a conventional gas boiler). Air source heat pumps perform optimally with higher levels of insulation, which adds to the costs. In our case, it involved raising the floor to create underfloor insulation over 200mm deep, combined with additional internal and external insulation to complement our existing 150mm cavity wall insulation – approximately 60 sheets of insulation, which was a further cost. We also added 12 solar panels (at a cost of £13,000) on each side of the house (24 in total) and a 10kw battery. Unfortunately, the cost to disconnect from the gas network is expensive, at £1,500-£2,000, and if this service isn't paid for, the electricity company will make a standing charge.

Using the 1am-4am reduced tariff, we can top up our battery overnight as necessary, though the solar panels made a net gain of £100 last year, so this is unlikely to be necessary.

Is it worth retrofitting a home?

Many people ask whether the extensive disruption and costs were worthwhile. The energy efficiency benefits are indisputable: our electricity and gas costs, previously £2,000-£2,400, were just £300 for the first year – but of course it will take many years to recoup the initial costs.

Another way of looking at it is that in 2024 our solar panels generated 3,049.8 kWh of electricity, equating to a saving of £750.86. We saved approximately £1,140 last year and our solar usage has helped reduce our carbon footprint by approximately 930 kg of CO_2 annually.

Any financial savings are only part of the objective and I'm personally very pleased to have completed the project because of the energy and emissions saved. But to appeal to those who don't have the upfront funds or the benefit of a grant, retrofit won't be viable until the costs are substantially reduced.

Benefits of HEM

Would my project have benefited from HEM? Yes and no. The property has now exceeded the FHS. Had HEM been in place, a more accurate calculation may have led me to do less and save money. So the question of benefit depends on the objectives of the project.

The intention of the FHS is that new homes built from 2025 produce 75-80% less carbon emissions than today's homes. My experience tells me that if a 50-year-old home can bring about this benefit, the goal is realistic, in theory.

Economies of scale

For new homes, economies of scale mean that energy-saving features can be significantly cheaper. The inclusion of an air source heat pump and solar panels (taking into account the efficiencies of buying in bulk) in a new home may add between £7,000-£10,000 – but at a saving of £1,300 per annum, this quicky becomes a benefit.

Conclusion

Taking a step back and considering the bigger picture, I am concerned that we may struggle to find the 300,000 heat pumps (and installation expertise) needed, assuming that the government's housebuilding targets are met. To put this in context, the UK registered 189,836 solar panel installations and 39,268 heat pumps in 2023, the latter representing a 19% increase on the previous year, according to MCS Foundation data.

And unfortunately, because solar panels and heat pumps aren't typically enough to power a home throughout the day/year, energy must still be sourced from the grid. To power homes using clean energy will requires a considerable increase in wind, solar and other sources of energy generation.

The industry certainly requires a more robust and accurate methodology as SAP calculations are based on information from 2010 (only SAP 10.2 has been updated more recently) and currently this creates difficulties in demonstrating compliance with the FHS.

I support the implementation of a sophisticated HEM which can help optimise the design of residential buildings for energy efficiency. By simulating the energy performance of different options, architects can identify the most effective strategies, while maintaining comfort and functionality.

Mark is a director and founder committee member of ALEP (the Association of Leasehold Enfranchisement Practitioners) and Partner and Head of the Landlord & Tenant team at law firm Bishop & Sewell. A leasehold reform specialist, Mark is recognised as a leading UK authority in this sector. He deals with a range of issues including freehold purchase, lease extension, services charges and landlord and tenant matters.

COMMONHOLD
And how will it change property ownership for flat owners?

Mark Chick markchick@alep.org.uk

Mark explains the little-used property ownership form of commonhold. He explains that while it might become more prominent if the current government promotes it through the Commonhold White Paper (19 March 2025), there are many pros and cons, which he outlines below.

What is commonhold?

Commonhold is a form of property ownership in England and Wales that allows homeowners to own their individual flats or units while collectively managing shared areas, such as hallways and gardens and the main structure of their building. This is done through membership of a company called a 'Commonhold Association.'

Commonhold is a type of freehold land under which each flat owner has two related interests – the ownership of the flat itself and also membership of the Commonhold Association. The owner must have both interests in order to have a valid title. Commonhold was introduced by the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002 as an alternative to leasehold.

Unlike leasehold, commonhold has no time limit—owners hold their properties indefinitely rather than for a set lease term. Each property owner automatically becomes a member of a Commonhold Association, which is responsible for managing and maintaining the structure of the building. Technically, this gives owners more control over maintenance and costs-based decision-making as there is no external freeholder or landlord.

Despite its potential advantages, commonhold has remained extremely rare to date, because of the way in which the current legislation has been drafted – the existing law envisaged only the simplest of cases and not the sort of multi-use developments that are commonplace in the 21st Century. In addition, there was no compulsion to make all new developments commonhold. It is often said (correctly) that more books have been written about commonhold than there are actual commonhold developments.

However, the Labour government – as evidenced in the Commonhold white paper – has reignited interest in commonhold, believing it to be a fairer and more transparent system of homeownership.

What are the pros and cons of commonhold?

Pros

With commonhold, there is no lease expiry: unlike leasehold, commonhold ownership is indefinite, eliminating the need for lease extensions, or to take collective action to buy the freehold. Property owners are responsible for collectively managing their building which technically gives them greater control – although this can also be seen as a disadvantage (see below).

The commonhold structure is inherently democratic with all flat owners having a vote in the ownership vehicle that sets the maintenance costs for the building and decides how the building should be repaired and managed.

In addition, there is a single document ‘the Commonhold Community Statement’ that sets out how the repairing and other obligations for the development are to work. This has the advantage that there is only one constitutional ‘rulebook’, unlike in a leasehold block where each unit has a lease that can potentially be different.

Technically, there may be more transparency over costs, although the commonhold regime is not subject to the control of the service charge legislation and therefore once a budget has been set by the Commonhold Association, that is ‘it’ and it is not possible to dispute the individual’s share of the costs. This is an item that any (extensive) revision of the law on commonhold will need to look to resolve.

Cons

While collective management gives the unit owners greater control, there is no-one other than the flat owners involved in the decision-making process, and this can have drawbacks. For instance, if a majority of flat owners are reluctant to spend on necessary maintenance, that can lead to issues of longer-term disrepair and lack of proper investment.

For instance, in Scotland where blocks of flats are owned collectively as freeholds (as the law is different there), there have been examples of these falling into disrepair as a result of poor management by the flat owners.

It is perhaps a fallacy to suggest that just because the only people with an interest in and responsibility for the maintenance of the building are the flat owners, that things are automatically going to be better managed. There are examples of self-managed blocks where significant issues, such as fire safety, have not been properly dealt with, causing greater cost and difficulty.

Self-managed blocks sometimes also get into difficulties - particularly where the residents do not opt to use third party managers, which is often short sighted, particularly where complex property interests are concerned.

There is a general lack of understanding around commonhold, specifically a long list of things that need to be ‘fixed’ before it can made fit for use. On one level this is not surprising as these are fairly technical and legal in nature. One of these is the position on insolvency, where all the members of the association would have to pay off all of the debts of the Commonhold Association to restore it and there could be no ‘disclaimer’ of its assets - unlike with an insolvent freehold company.

At the moment, 80% of the unit holders can vote to bring the commonhold to an end. This is concerning to mortgage lenders and is one significant reason why commonhold in its current form has not been advanced.

The Commonhold Community Statement has the advantage that all the 'rules' for the development are in a single place. This is good for transparency. However, the disadvantage is that the statement can be amended by a majority vote. If this happens, certain owners may be marginalised and unhappy with the outcome. With leasehold there is little chance of amending the existing grant unless both parties agree. Consider, for instance, a provision preventing Airbnb type lettings: it could be that this provision could be removed by a number of investors, to the detriment of residents.

When a resident buys into a leasehold scheme they know that the lease terms are set, and it is very difficult for the freeholder to move away from them.

Proponents of commonhold see the absence of a freeholder as a benefit (specifically because ground rents are no longer charged), but when problems occur, sometimes having a single entity responsible for resolving the issue is a benefit. The freeholder has an economic interest in seeing value maintained in the block and is likely to be prepared to take difficult decisions in relation to management (albeit because these are not at their cost). They also have the 'big stick' of forfeiture to act as the ultimate sanction in extreme cases of non-compliance, although it has to be borne in mind that actual cases of forfeiture are extremely rare.

Should those looking to buy a leasehold flat hold off until these commonhold changes happen?

This does not seem particularly sensible as the changes may take many years to come about. Additionally, there are pros and cons to commonhold and it would be wrong to assume that an owner of a leasehold flat was automatically any worse off than the owner of a commonhold flat – certainly at least until all of the known problems with commonhold have been ironed out.

If you buy a flat at the moment, it can only be leasehold. This is likely to remain the case for some time to come, whatever the promises in the White Paper. After all, the White Paper is the precursor to legislation itself and it is likely to be some time before we see the draft Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill.

What does this all mean for those in existing leasehold agreements?

In practical terms, those who have bought flats as leasehold properties will find that these remain as leasehold properties, and could only be converted to commonhold if all the flat owners and freehold owner agree. It is important to realise that the government's proposed change is only intended to effect <u>new</u> properties. There will be no 'magic wand' converting all existing residential leaseholds to commonhold.

Existing tools, such as the recently extended Right to Manage, allow owners of leasehold properties to take on the management of properties in some circumstances and where these have been exercised, the management concerns may fall away.

Leasehold should not be seen as a second class form of tenure and as a workable system has much to commend it.

There are likely to be lots of leasehold properties for years to come, even if a ban on new leasehold flats comes into force and therefore, we need to be careful not to 'talk down' leasehold as an asset class. After all, at the moment the only type of flat that you can buy will be leasehold and the ills that some owners have experienced are in many cases as much down to poor management, as much as the fact that the freehold is in third party hands.

Could existing leasehold properties be converted to commonhold and what would this involve?

Under the 2002 Act, existing leasehold properties can be converted to commonhold in England and Wales, but the process is complex and rarely undertaken as it is little better than the option to buy the freehold and extend the lease.

Additionally, under the current law, all leaseholders and the freeholder must agree to the conversion, which is a significant barrier, and of course this unanimity is hard if not impossible to achieve.

To convert, leaseholders must form a Commonhold Association, purchase the freehold (if they don't already own it), and then implement the necessary changes - such as putting in place a Commonhold Community Statement, which sets out rules for managing the building. However, because of legal and financial complexities - such as mortgage lender reluctance and potential enfranchisement costs - very few leasehold buildings have successfully converted to commonhold. At the moment, the existing form of commonhold is not 'fit for purpose' and it would be a brave group of flat owners that set out to do this with the law as it currently stands.

The reforms currently being discussed, and due to be clarified later this year in a Leasehold and Commonhold Reform Bill, will aim to simplify the process and perhaps it may then be easier to carry out a conversion, potentially removing the need for full agreement among leaseholders and freeholders, although this suggestion itself is not without its potential challenges.

Therefore, while it might be possible to convert in the future, if the leaseholders own the freehold and each have a 999-year lease at a nil ground rent, it is hard to see what the additional benefit that commonhold would have for flat owners that would encourage them to convert.

Rebekah is a Director in the Town Centres and Economic Regeneration team at Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH), where she leads on shaping and delivering strategic advice to public sector clients across the UK. With a strong focus on place-based transformation, she works with local authorities and other public bodies to unlock the potential of public assets – helping to secure investment, drive regeneration, and deliver outcomes that matter to communities.

Rebekah brings a wealth of experience in aligning estate strategies with broader social, economic, and environmental goals. Her work is grounded in a deep understanding of how places function and how public sector estates can be reimagined to support inclusive growth and long-term resilience. In 2023, she was appointed to the Board of the Institute of Economic Development (IED), where she contributes to national conversations on policy, innovation, and best practice in economic development.

INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Reimagining our cities and towns: A new era of industrial and infrastructure alignment

Rebekah Formosa RFormosa@lsh.co.uk

Rebekah is optimistic that the government's 2025 Industrial and Infrastructure Strategies are a "blueprint for transformation". There are opportunities for local authorities to take the initiative, but they must act holistically to achieve funding.

Industrial and Infrastructure Strategies

2025 may be remembered as the year the UK finally joined the dots between industrial ambition, infrastructure delivery, and local regeneration. The UK's twin strategies released in June 2025 – the Industrial Strategy and the Infrastructure Strategy – mark a pivotal moment for the future of our cities and towns. For those of us working in property consultancy, particularly in the realms of city and town centre regeneration and economic development, these documents are more than policy, they are a blueprint for transformation.

At the heart of both strategies lies a shared ambition: to rebalance the economy through place-based investment, long-term planning, and a renewed partnership between public and private sectors. The Industrial Strategy sets out a 10-year vision to drive growth in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, creative industries, clean energy, and digital technology. But crucially, it recognises that innovation does not happen in isolation; it needs places to thrive. City and town centres, long seen as retail hubs in decline, are being reimagined as engines of inclusive growth, cultural vibrancy, and entrepreneurial energy.

The Infrastructure Strategy complements this vision by addressing the structural barriers that have held back regeneration for decades. It introduces a 10-year pipeline of infrastructure investment, with a focus on housing, transport, digital connectivity, and social infrastructure. This is not just about big-ticket projects, but about enabling local authorities to plan with confidence, attract private capital, and deliver integrated regeneration that meets the needs of communities.

National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority

One of the most promising developments is the creation of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA). Through its interactive pipeline, launching in July, local authorities and developers will gain unprecedented visibility into upcoming projects, funding opportunities, and procurement routes. This transparency is a game-changer. It allows regeneration proposals to be aligned with national priorities, increasing their chances of securing support and investment.

The NISTA pipeline will include detailed data on project timelines, scope, funding status, and procurement routes. It is designed to increase transparency and attract private investment, while giving local authorities the tools to align their regeneration proposals with national infrastructure priorities. For city and town centres, this means that projects which integrate transport-oriented development, digital infrastructure such as 5G and fibre, and green infrastructure such as urban greening and flood resilience, will be better positioned to secure funding.

Invest 2035 programme

The Invest 2035 programme, launched under the Industrial Strategy, is another cornerstone of this new policy landscape. With £18bn earmarked over the next decade, it offers a flagship fund for regeneration, infrastructure, and innovation. It simplifies access to public-private funding streams and prioritises projects that demonstrate long-term impact, sustainability, and economic inclusion. City and town centres that embrace mixed-use development, cultural and creative hubs, and innovation districts will be well-placed to benefit.

Importantly, both strategies emphasise the role of local leadership. Councils and combined authorities are expected to take the lead in shaping regeneration strategies, with more autonomy over how funds are allocated. This shift empowers local actors to tailor solutions to the unique needs of their communities, while aligning with national goals.

2025 Spending Review

The 2025 Spending Review adds fiscal muscle to these strategies. It confirms multi-year departmental budgets through to 2029–30, with capital investment growing by 2.3% across the period. It recommits to long-term funding for housing, transport, and local growth, and explicitly aligns with the goals of the Industrial and Infrastructure Strategies. The Spending Review also introduces a clear signal that future funding will be tied to outcomes, efficiency, and alignment with national priorities.

For local authorities and developers, this means regeneration proposals that integrate housing, transport, and innovation, especially those aligned with the NISTA pipeline, will be best placed to secure funding. The Spending Review also recommits to multi-year local government settlements, giving councils the certainty they need to plan and invest. This is particularly important for city and town centre projects, which often require long lead times and complex partnerships.

But the Spending Review also sounds a note of caution. While it increases investment in key areas, it also demands greater efficiency. Councils remain under financial pressure, and the expectation is clear: regeneration must deliver not just growth, but social, environmental, and economic value.

INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS

- 10-YEAR VISION
- INVEST 2035
  £18bn for regeneration and innovation
- SECTOR FOCUS:
  Advanced Manufacturing; Clean Energy Industries; Creative Industries; Digital & Technologies; Financial Services; Defence; Lie Sciences; Professional & Business Services

INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS

- 10-YEAR INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE
- FOCUS ON HOUSING, TRANSPORT, DIGITAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
- CREATION OF NISTA

NISTA PIPELINE FEATURES

- INTERACTIVE PORTAL LAUNCHING JULY 2025
- PROJECT TIMELINES, FUNDING STATUS, PROCUREMENT ROUTES
- ALIGNS LOCAL PROJECTS WITH NATIONAL PRIORITIES

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

- INTEGRATE GREEN AND DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE
- BUILD CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS
- POSITION CENTRES AS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSETS

Lambert Smith Hampton SHAPING THE FUTURE OF OUR CENTRES

Councils to act holistically

This is a call to action. We at LSH are here to help our clients think holistically. That means integrating green infrastructure, digital connectivity, and skills development into every regeneration plan. It means forging partnerships across sectors – linking housing with health, culture with commerce, and education with enterprise. And it means engaging early with combined authorities and NISTA to ensure our projects are not just viable, but visionary.

The 2025 strategies are not perfect, and delivery will be complex. But they offer a rare moment of coherence in UK policy; a chance to align industrial ambition with infrastructure delivery, and to put city and town centres at the heart of national renewal. As the first funding rounds open and the NISTA portal goes live, the real work begins. Let us make sure our centres are ready.

HEAT NETWORKS
Exciting opportunities for local authorities in the heat network sector

Nick Helm and Adam Hulme Nick.Helm@mills-reeve.com
Adam.Hulme@mills-reeve.com

Construction of heat networks is gathering momentum, supported by government and forthcoming regulation. Nick and Adam consider an exciting opportunity for local authorities to unlock environmental benefits and lower costs, given that many local authorities have net zero targets to meet by 2030 or 2035. "Heat networks therefore present local authorities with an exciting opportunity to forge the way in supporting both new sources of heat, and decarbonising heat in urban areas."

Nick is an infrastructure specialist with a strong background in PFI/PPP and transport projects. His clients include the public sector (central and local government), bidders, sponsors/investors and funders and his experience takes in infrastructure, transport, PFI/PPP projects and increasingly energy, renewables and net zero projects. He routinely leads large teams of lawyers, typically forming part of wider multi-disciplinary teams, and his advice is often on strategic matters.

Adam specialises in advising on contracts for the supply of goods and services, IT services supply contracts and data protection matters. Adam also advises on heat network projects for both heat suppliers and off-takers. He has extensive experience of advising on public sector procurement projects, having previously worked in-house for a number of years at Transport for Greater Manchester.

What is a heat network?

Heat networks enable heat and hot water to be distributed from a central 'energy centre', via mainly underground pipes, to multiple buildings.

Boiler systems in connected buildings would be replaced with new infrastructure, to enable circulation of heat from the network. The energy centre becomes the source of the heat supply.

Heat networks have a long history – with the first networks being tested nearly 150 years ago. Distribution of heat from a centralised heat source was taken forward in New York city in the late 19th century. In the UK, heat networks were used in blocks of flats in the 1960s and 1970s. Denmark was one of the first countries to start using heat networks on a wide scale, in response to the oil crisis in 1973. Currently, heat networks are commonly used in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, and in city areas in the USA and Canada. There are around 14,000 heat networks in the UK, with many being 'campus-style', providing heat to groups of social housing or hospital/NHS campuses (for example).

Why join a heat network?

Modern heat networks can utilise sources of low carbon heat. These include energy from waste facilities, geothermal sources, solar thermal arrays, air and ground source heat pumps and data centres.

Participating in a heat network is likely to be more environmentally friendly and, in some cases, more cost-effective than maintaining older, inefficient gas-fired heating systems.

Are heat networks being supported financially in the UK?

It is estimated that 50% of buildings in the UK are located in areas which would be suitable for the construction of a heat network, which currently supply around 2% to 3% of the UK's heat. The Committee on Climate Change predicts that in order to meet net zero targets (with around 20% of heat supply being from heat networks), it is estimated that investment will need to equate to £60 to £80bn by 2050.

The government has confirmed its support for the sector, as re-iterated at November's Association for Decentralised

Energy Conference by Miatta Fahnbulleh, Minister for Energy Consumers. The government has set a target for at least 18% of the UK's heat demand to be met from heat networks by 2050. Over £600m of government funding has been allocated to develop and improve heat networks.

The government's recently published 'Clean Power 2030 Action Plan' sets out that the National Wealth Fund will make available an expanded suite of financial instruments, as part of investment in heat networks and other clean energy sectors.

The growing prominence of Great British Energy, backed by government, is also likely to involve further support for heat networks as a renewable energy source. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero already significantly supports the sector via capital grant funding from the Green Heat Network Fund.

In addition, the Heat Network Efficiency Scheme offers grant funding to applicants who are responsible for operating or managing heat networks.

Financial support for heat networks is supplemented by the work of other bodies such as the Heat Networks Industry Council, which is a joint industry and government forum that aims to grow the heat network sector.

Taken together, it is clear that there is genuine ambition to ensure that heat networks play a key role in helping the UK meet its net zero ambitions.

Notable heat network developments

A number of major heat network projects are underway, including (i) the hugely ambitious South Westminster Area Network (referred to as "SWAN"), which will supply low carbon heating to the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery and large areas of Whitehall, and (ii) the Leeds PIPES heat network, which connects to over 3,000 dwellings.

The existence of these projects, and numerous others, is evidence of a growing trend in the emergence of heat networks as a major contributor to the UK's net zero ambitions.

Local authorities are already taking a pro-active and significant role in multiple heat networks across the country, including a new heat network under construction in Bradford, numerous heat networks in London, and already established networks in Coventry and Nottingham.

Relevance to local authorities

Given the location of the projects mentioned above, local authorities based in urban areas should also consider whether it is feasible for their buildings to connect to a heat network, and whether a heat network is planned in their area. Local authorities will be involved in the following key ways:

- local authorities will be approached by heat network operators/developers for the purposes of:
  - securing planning permission to take forward the construction of an energy centre and/or required pipework being installed; and
  - determining whether the local authority itself wishes to become a heat off-taker from the proposed heat network
- highway authorities will need to be consulted in respect of the digging of any trenches, into which the pipework will be installed, with relevant permissions granted, or agreements entered into, in order to facilitate works on or underneath adopted highway; and
- local authorities may themselves decide to procure the construction of a heat network in respect of some or all of their buildings.

Heat networks therefore present local authorities with an exciting opportunity to forge the way in supporting both new sources of heat, and decarbonising heat in urban areas.

Regulation of the heat network sector

Aside from regulations that govern billing and metering, the heat network sector is largely not regulated. This, however, has started to change – the Heat Networks (Market Framework) (Great Britain) Regulations 2025 are coming into force in stages over the coming months. Ofgem will regulate heat networks in Great Britain.

For example, as from 1 April 2025, it has become illegal to operate or supply heat from a heat network without authorisation, although:

- an existing heat network operator, as at 1 April 2025, will be deemed to be authorised; and
- any new operator will also be deemed to be authorised if they begin a heat supply prior to 26 January 2027 (any new operator seeking to begin a heat supply after this date will need to apply for an authorisation from Ofgem).

The regulations will otherwise largely come into force on 27 January 2026.

Regulation had also been the subject of consultation, including consideration of how different groups of consumers are to be protected, and specific arrangements on standards of conduct and billing transparency.

In addition, the proposed regulations do not specifically refer to a 'supplier of last resort' regime, which would enable an authorised entity to continue the operation of a heat network where the relevant operator had become insolvent. We understand that Ofgem and the government are considering how this would work, given the complexity of arranging for the ownership transfer of infrastructure and capital assets. We await further developments on this, but are aware of proposals for Ofgem to be able to issue 'Last Resort Directions' for an authorised supplier to assume the operation of a heat network where the original heat supplier is not able to continue operating. Ofgem's proposed 'back-stop' solution is a 'Special Administration Regime', like what is used already in the gas and electricity sectors.

The scheme rules of the Heat Trust, which operates to protect the interests of domestic and micro-business customers of heat networks, partly informed the content of forthcoming regulations. The Heat Trust's voluntary scheme is intended to establish common standards of heat supply and associated customer service (with standards of service comparable to those required by Ofgem of electricity and gas suppliers). We therefore anticipate robust standards to be introduced within the regulations, for a wider group of consumers.

Of particular interest to local authorities will be new measures to designate specific geographic areas as heat network zones. Within these zones, certain types of buildings will be required to connect to a heat network within a set timeframe. Although it is contemplated that the implementation of heat network zoning will be overseen by a new Heat Network Zoning Authority, we anticipate that once zoning comes into effect, local authorities will receive higher amounts of planning applications (for example) to facilitate the construction of heat networks within relevant zones, where such zones fall within the local authority's area of planning responsibility. This is in addition to the proposal for local government to provide the 'local zoning co-ordinator' teams that will designate the heat network zones, and enforce requirements within them. This is likely to represent a significant new workstream for local authorities.

Legal support

Connecting to a heat network involves technical aspects relating to design, maintenance, service standards, and availability of a 'green' heat supply. Legal support is key, as well as specialised technical support. Examples of relevant legal topics include:

- procurement risks
- design and delivery risks
- real estate and contamination issues
- construction issues, particularly around connection work and secondary side works
- exclusivity arrangements; and
- change in law' provisions (especially given forthcoming regulation).

The Mills & Reeve Team

Mills & Reeve advises heat suppliers and off-takers on their participation in heat networks.

If you are considering participating in a heat network, or if you are seeking further information about the proposed regulation of the sector and how this could affect you, please do contact the M&R team.

Mark is the founder and Director of Shared Assets, an infrastructure organisation working to create a socially just future through practical projects that build new relationships between people and the land..

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Community ownership needs local authority support

Mark Walton mark@sharedassets.org.uk

Mark outlines the possible government initiatives towards community ownership. "What is increasingly clear however is that funding and support for community asset ownership is more likely to be delivered at a local than a national level for the foreseeable future. This gives local authorities a key role in supporting, funding and facilitating the transfer of land and buildings to communities."

Community Ownership Fund

In December 2024, the government announced that an anticipated final round of the Community Ownership Fund (COF) would not go ahead. The COF was a £150m government-funded programme to provide grants to local communities across the UK to take control of assets, amenities or facilities at risk of closure - from parks to pubs, and lidos to libraries. It was closed with £15m still unspent and communities across the country who had been planning their applications, were left in uncertainty as to when, or whether, a new programme will be launched.

A campaign by a group of local and national leaders led by Power to Change called on the government to back community ownership by making £150m of public funding available in the spending review, and leveraging £350m of other forms of finance like social investment. However, the Spending Review did not include any such commitment to establish a new community ownership fund. As noted by Locality CEO Tony Armstrong, this feels like a missed opportunity to support local grassroots organisations to use *"community ownership to revitalise local neighbourhoods, drive economic growth and reignite pride in place".*

Since its launch in 2021, the COF has awarded £135m to 409 projects across the UK, with 283 projects in England, 57 projects in Scotland, 30 projects in Wales, and 39 projects in Northern Ireland. Groups could apply for capital funding to purchase or lease a local asset and/or help cover refurbishments. The programme provided pre- and post-application support through a consortium of delivery partners led by Locality and including Shared Assets, Plunkett UK, Cooperatives UK, Cwmpas, Development Trusts Association Scotland, Development Trusts Association Wales, Development Trusts Northern Ireland, Architectural Heritage Fund, and Sporting Assets.

Shared Assets has supported nearly 40 groups to make applications, or to secure their funding and deliver their projects. These include community organisations and parish councils working to secure the future of assets such as stables, nature reserves, parks and disused buildings. Their projects aim to transform them from disused or underused spaces into learning, therapeutic, enterprising and social community assets. Pre-application support helped applicants not just to make the applications, but to support them to develop long-term sustainable business models and ensure they had good governance in place to enable them to create sustainable jobs, educational opportunities, and improve the health, wellbeing and environment of the local communities.

Despite the failure to deliver a new national community ownership fund, the spending review did make commitments to provide £500m of investment in 25 new "neighbourhood trailblazers", to establish a "new local growth fund" and to specifically allocate resources to 350 deprived communities across the UK.

New neighbourhood level investments

The English Devolution White Paper also promises: *"a new community 'right to buy' for valued community assets, such as empty shops, pubs and community spaces"* in order to *"empower local people to bring community spaces back into community ownership and end the blight of empty premises on our high streets".*

The exact delivery mechanisms of these new neighbourhood level investments, and the details of any new or strengthened community rights remain uncertain. The White Paper currently only mentions assets such as "local news outlets, community cafes, youth clubs, pubs, historic buildings, libraries or sport facilities" and does not mention the right to purchase land.

It is also based on so-called Assets of Community Value, whose definition is backward and limited, pertaining to assets whose main use is or has recently been to further the social wellbeing of the local community or could do so in the future. These 'social interests' are narrowly defined as cultural, recreational and sporting interests, definitions which prevent communities from purchasing land or buildings that may have no history of community use, but which could be used to help them deliver future ambitions, including economic, democratic, or social interests.

What is increasingly clear however is that funding and support for community asset ownership is more likely to be delivered at a local than a national level for the foreseeable future.

This gives local authorities a key role in supporting, funding and facilitating the transfer of land and buildings to communities. This may seem like a challenging task for them, given the financial difficulties facing local councils. Last year 19 were given permission by the government to sell assets to fund day to day delivery of services. In these circumstances, it may be hard to argue that councils should be funding communities to purchase assets, supporting them to do so, or making asset transfers at less than market value.

However, there is a powerful argument that community ownership and community led development provides benefits that other forms of ownership and development do not. Power to Change suggest that national and local government should back *"the people who are bringing empty high streets shops back into use, not the distant owners who leave the buildings people care about empty […] the people who are clubbing together to save their local, not the people who want to knock it down […] the people who care for our green spaces and rivers, not those who litter and pollute them"* and that they should empower and support *"communities to take back control and make their places better."*

This is particularly the case for the communities most marginalised from the land and property system such as refugees, migrants and communities of colour, for whom asset ownership can open new opportunities, new forms of connection and belonging, and the power of property ownership.

Key roles for local authorities

Research we undertook with partners from across Europe as part of the recent Horizon 2020 Ruralisation project identified three key roles that local authorities can play to support communities to access or own land and buildings: landowner, facilitator and regulator.

As a landowner they can invest by acting as a partner in a co-acquisition or purchasing land and buildings that communities are unable to raise finance for in the short term but could fundraise for over a longer term. They can manage underutilised land or buildings in ways that enable them to be used by local communities for mutual benefit. They can also act strategically to map publicly owned assets, consult on their use, and support groups to quantify the costs and benefits of their use.

As a facilitator local authorities have considerable convening power to bring different departments and public, private and community interests together to deliver shared objectives. They can intermediate between different stakeholders, help to raise awareness of the value of community ownership and management, and ensure that the data they hold is accessible. They could also provide specific support to community ownership projects through local business support and economic development programmes.

As a regulator local councils have a key role in planning, and in administering the regulatory tools at their disposal. They can also be a powerful catalyst by providing funding and a supportive policy environment. Finally they can advocate for community ownership and management, using institutional channels to influence national policy by communicating local needs and realities, and by pointing out where national policies are unhelpful or incoherent to the community ownership agenda.

The centrality of local authorities to community asset ownership is illustrated by Platform Places. Their Local Property Partnerships Pilot Programme convenes and supports councils, communities and asset owners, to create Local Property Partnerships in their town centre in

Organic Lea

order to bring buildings into community use or ownership, for local benefit, for the long term.

What can be done better?

At Shared Assets, we want to see a strengthened community right to buy that includes land specifically and a broader, more forward-looking definition of assets of community value. We believe that this should be backed by longer term and more consistent national funding programmes, with a simpler application process and more accessible support, especially for the most marginalised communities. One successful example is Organic Lea, a community owned market garden on a local authority owned ex-nursery site.

In the absence of such a national programme of support, and with funds increasingly being targeted at local regeneration, it is important for local authorities to step into their roles as landowners, facilitators and regulators to foster entrepreneurship and empower communities through community asset ownership.

ACES

The Terrier
ACES Secretary: Trevor Bishop MRICS
07853 262255 - secretary@aces.org.uk
ACES Editor: Betty Albon editor@aces.org.uk

Tom is a Senior Planner at JLL with over seven years of experience in public and private sector planning across the north of England, with a focus on Yorkshire and the North East. He is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and has extensive experience in strategic land finding, managing planning applications and local plan representations.

Yvette is an Associate at JLL, covering the Midlands, North of England, and North Wales, assisting, preparing, and project managing planning applications across all sectors. She joined JLL in 2018, has over seven years' experience in the private planning sector, and is a Chartered Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Unlocking value: Open mosaic habitats and the future of BNG

Tom Procter and Yvette Black Tom.Procter1@jll.com Yvette.Black@jll.com

Tom and Yvette presented to a meeting of North East Branch and kindly agreed to follow up with this article about an innovative approach to BNG through open mosaic habitats, and proposed reforms to the BNG rules, particularly for small sites – as well as opportunities for councils to play a positive role.

Open mosaic habitats

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is rapidly becoming a cornerstone of sustainable development, driving a shift in how we approach land management and development. Introduced by the Environment Act 2021, BNG now mandates that new developments achieve a 10% increase in biodiversity, aiming to leave the natural environment in a better state, while supporting economic growth. While the concept is straightforward, the implementation can be complex, particularly when dealing with assets that have limited development potential.

This article explores an innovative approach to BNG using "open mosaic habitats" – often overlooked areas within existing government assets – to create valuable habitat banks. We'll delve into the concept of open mosaic habitats, their ecological benefits, and how they can be strategically managed to deliver significant BNG outcomes. To illustrate the potential challenges of open mosaic habitats, we'll present a case study highlighting the

significant costs involved, along with actionable tips and insights to guide your own BNG initiatives on local government estates.

Open mosaic habitats are characterised by a mix of bare ground, grasslands, and scrub on previously developed or disturbed land, and are of a high biodiversity value. These often-overlooked areas, found on sites like abandoned industrial locations, quarries or former railways, offer unique opportunities for ecological enhancement.

Open Mosaic Habitat (OMH) is classified as a 'high distinctiveness' habitat in the UK's BNG statutory metric. This creates practical issues because BNG's "trading rules" require that developers compensate for the loss of high distinctiveness habitats like OMH with habitat units of the same type, which is difficult and expensive. Creating new OMH on-site or purchasing it from third-party landowners is challenging due to undersupply in the market. Statutory biodiversity credits are available from the government, but they are deliberately expensive and subject to a "spatial risk multiplier," potentially costing developers £960,000 (plus VAT) for just 10 OMH units. These costs could make brownfield sites less attractive for development, jeopardising the government's goal of building 1.5 million new homes.

Not all brownfield sites will support open mosaic habitats, particularly where hardstanding areas dominate. It is clear that more sites are needed, until potential reforms are introduced creating clear opportunities for estates with landholdings to create OMH habitat banks in their local area for others to purchase credits and to offset their own developments. This creates ways to unlock and add significant value to sites with no or limited development potential.

By carefully managing and restoring these habitats, we can transform underutilised land into thriving ecosystems, delivering significant BNG outcomes, while also generating potential revenue streams through the creation of OMH habitat banks. This approach not only contributes to conservation goals, but also unlocks hidden value in properties and land with limited conventional development potential.

Proposed BNG reforms

The government is seeking input on how to improve the implementation of BNG in England, especially for smaller developments and those on brownfield sites, with a consultation live until 24 July.

While BNG has generally worked well for larger projects, smaller ones face hurdles such as increased costs and time, financial burdens related to habitat improvements, and a need for more expertise among developers and local planning authorities. The consultation explores potential changes to BNG regulations, the small sites metric (SSM), and related guidance to address these challenges.

Several options are being considered to streamline the BNG process. These include reforming existing exemptions and potentially introducing new ones, such as revisions for self-build developments, and increasing the threshold for the 'de minimis' exemption. A more radical option is a full exemption for all minor developments.

The consultation also addresses the SSM, exploring amendments to provide more flexibility in meeting BNG requirements onsite, simplifying habitat classifications, and offering additional guidance for habitat identification.

To increase flexibility, the consultation considers allowing minor developments to more easily use off-site BNG options. This includes relaxing the biodiversity gain hierarchy and amending the spatial risk multiplier, which currently requires developers to purchase more off-site units if they are located further from the development site.

Specific challenges related to brownfield developments with OMH are also addressed. The government is considering updates to metric definitions, guidance, and condition assessment to support ecologists in the identification of OMH and allowing the loss of OMH habitats to be compensated for with alternative mosaic habitats.

While the government's effort to refine BNG implementation is commendable, the core challenge lies in balancing environmental ambitions with practical feasibility. Exemptions and relaxed rules, while potentially easing the burden on developers, could dilute the overall effectiveness of BNG. The key will be striking a balance that ensures genuine biodiversity gains without stifling smaller developments, or creating loopholes that undermine the initiative's original intent. The success of these revisions hinges on clear, enforceable standards and adequate support for local authorities to ensure consistent and rigorous application of the BNG principles.

Case study

JLL acted for an advanced manufacturing operator, based in Yorkshire, which was looking to expand its operation and develop new facilities. The client purchased approximately 7ha of previously developed land to provide the new facility. During due diligence, we identified that the site contained an area of OMH. Factoring this in, our client purchased the site and prepared a planning application, for which we secured consent earlier this year.

The key issues relating to the OMH were:

- The site contained approximately 3 ha of OMH, which was graded by ecologists as being "moderate" quality
- This equates to approximately 41 units of habitat in the statutory metric
- The proposed redevelopment resulted in the loss of all OMH on site and it was not possible to re-provide any OMH on site
- The client therefore needed to purchase off-site credits from a registered habitat bank
- Identified a local habitat bank which offered sufficient OMH credits
- Former quarry site with approximately 5.9 ha of OMH
- The 30-year management plan for the habitat bank involved improving the quality of the existing OMH, allowing them to sell 72.73 OMH credits to developers
- Credits are sold at £77,000 each, meaning that 5.9 ha of OMH represents a total potential income of approximately £5.6 m
- The cost to our client of replacing 3ha of OMH was over £3m.

Summary

Amid the UK's drive for sustainable development, this article unveils the untapped potential of OMHs to reconcile ecological ambitions with economic realities. By transforming often-overlooked brownfield sites into valuable habitat banks, local authorities and developers can not only meet mandatory BNG targets, but also unlock revenue streams from land with limited conventional development potential.

Examining proposed BNG reforms and a real-world case study, this analysis offers actionable insights into navigating the complexities and costs associated with OMH, paving the way for a future where biodiversity enhancement and financial value go hand in hand.

Top tips

JLL's top tips for estate surveyors are:

- Instruct experienced ecologists to check what habitat type your brownfield sites are and look at adding value to these through the creation of habitat banks where there is no development potential, and specifically for OMH
- Instruct planning consultants to identify and undertake feasibility studies on these sites to confirm that there is likely to be limited development potential
- Monitor changes to BNG principles and rules.

Jess leads the Natural Capital division at Nicholsons, offering a bespoke, client-focused service that translates complex environmental markets into actionable, site-specific strategies. Drawing on a strong background in ecological consultancy and land management, Jess works closely with clients to assess their natural capital baseline and identify tailored opportunities across biodiversity, carbon, nutrient neutrality and wider ecosystem services.

Under her leadership, the team provides end-to-end support from initial scoping through to implementation and long-term management. With access to in-house ecologists, GIS specialists and contracting teams, Jess ensures each project is underpinned by robust data, expert insight, and a clear understanding of emerging market trends. Committed to delivering practical outcomes that balance environmental benefit with commercial viability, Jess helps landowners, businesses and investors navigate the evolving natural capital space with confidence.

NATURE RECOVERY OPPORTUNITIES

The role of the public and private sectors in nature recovery

Jess Bradley jess@nicholsonsgb.com

Jess gives a comprehensive update on nature recovery and carbon initiatives, backed by financial implications and useful bibliography. However, "The stability and direction of policy and funding from the public sector is crucial for instilling confidence in the private sector that these markets are viable for investment."

The United Kingdom has committed to reaching net zero by 2050 (The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019). According to the Climate Change Committee (CCC) "the country is not on track to hit this target" (CCC, 2024). Recent developments within natural capital markets are creating new income streams for farmers, alongside government-led schemes such as Landscape Recovery and the Nature Restoration Fund (GOV.UK, 2025), highlighting the commitment from both the public and private sector to protect and restore the environment. The challenge is translating natural capital values to active capital markets.

The Issue

The Finance Gap for UK Nature highlighted that there is between a £44 and £97bn funding gap over the next 10 years for achieving the UK's nature-related outcomes. Private financing is essential to support nature recovery. The closure of the Sustainable Farming Incentive without a notification period has dealt a

blow to farmer confidence in government schemes (Sansome, 2025), however it has highlighted opportunities to spread risk through using a combination of private markets and public funding.

As highlighted in the most recent roundtable discussion this month with Mary Creagh, the Minister for Nature, interest in nature markets is widespread but participation is held back due to lack of effective governance, credit integrity, absence of market rules, and uncertainty over future market development (UK Nature Markets Dialogue, 2025).

Challenges

The market for biodiversity metrics has become saturated, with over 140 different metrics currently available (Bloom Labs, 2025). The British Standards Institute has developed a framework that outlines overarching principles for nature markets, including the supply of biodiversity benefits and nature-based carbon benefits. Additionally, frameworks for the supply of nutrient reduction benefits and for community engagement related to natural capital products are in development. Funded by DEFRA, these frameworks aim to enhance the integrity of biodiversity credits and provide clear guidelines for both landowners and investors.

Questions remain about the opportunities of stacking and additionality. However, with a current call for evidence from the government to understand how they can support and incentivise business to invest in nature recovery, this highlights the government's commitment to creating a route for private investment.

Marketplace updates: BNG

BNG is currently generating £454.6m in annual economic value. This demand is driven by heightened regulatory pressures, such as the Taskforce for Nature-related Financial Disclosures, as well as uncertainty surrounding public funding. Insights from the voluntary market indicate that there is no distinct trend among industry buyers; however, the importance of locality is critical for these buyers (Gradeckas, 2025).

The stability and direction of policy and funding from the public sector is crucial for instilling confidence in the private sector that these markets are viable for investment. The implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects has been postponed until May 2026 (GOV.UK, 2025). The consultation on this issue is set to close on 24 July 2025.

There are proposals to create and expand exemptions, potentially including all developments of nine houses or fewer. Currently, these small developments account for 70% of residential planning applications in the UK (George, 2025). These proposed changes are causing uncertainty, leading to a significant level of risk for market leaders in the nature sector.

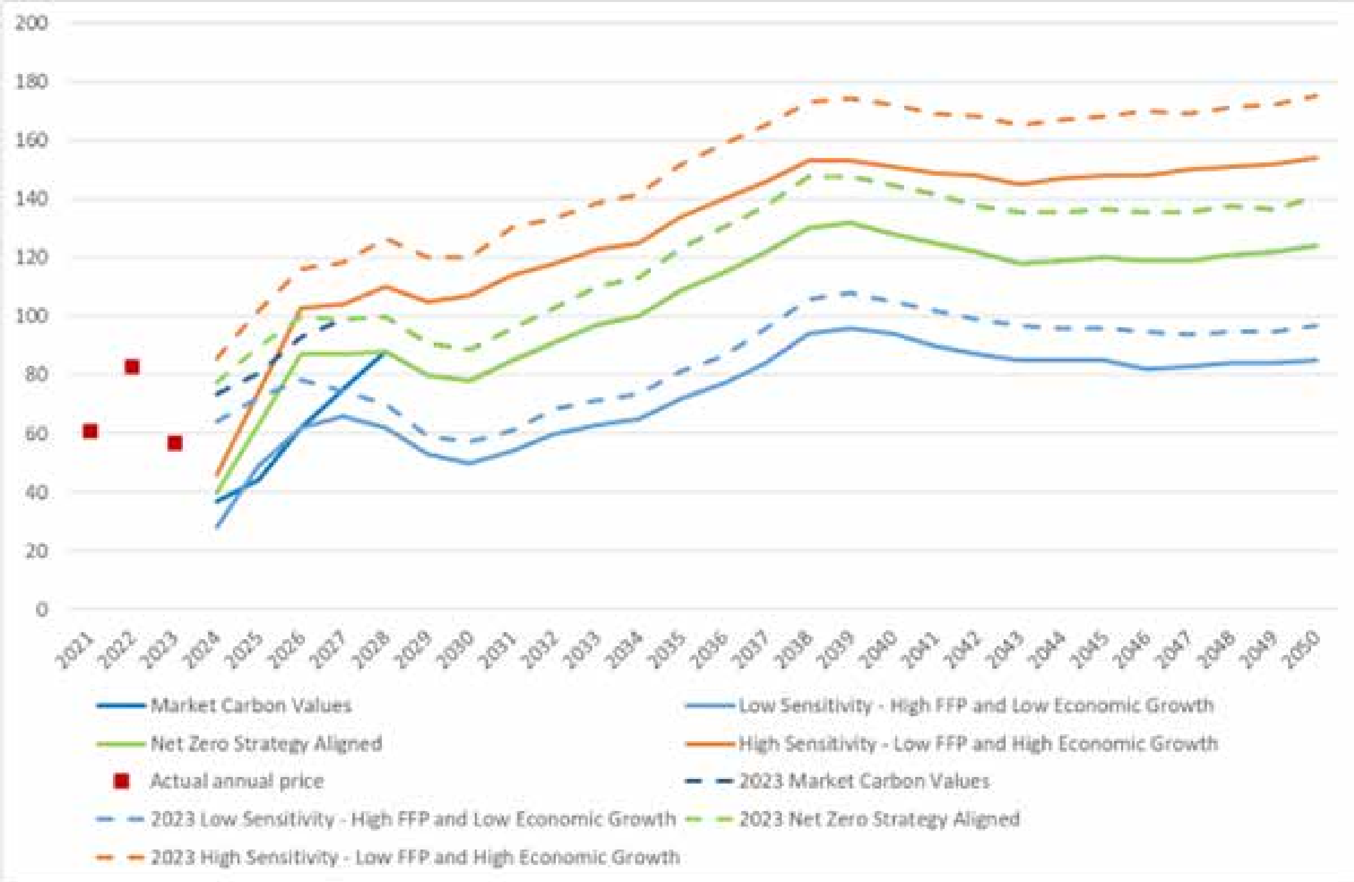
Through our Nature Environment Investment Readiness Fund with Sylva and Forestry Canopy Foundation, we have researched the current and potential future BNG market opportunities within 'Woodlands into Management', to support the £1.3bn 'finance gap' for woodland creation and management (Hollingdale, 2023). Co-developed projects and engaging with buyers from the outset can create bespoke, high-integrity schemes across a range of habitats, including woodlands, watercourses, grassland and scrub.

Marketplace Updates: Carbon

The growth of the voluntary carbon market is steadily increasing at 28% (GOV.UK, 2023). It is expected to continue growing, with demand from both the voluntary and compliance markets. Units have doubled in price from £11.02 in 2020 to £26.85 in 2024. Traded carbon values are predicted to increase by 300%, averaging £109 per unit by 2035 (GOV.UK, 2024).

Carbon markets are estimated to attract £10bn in private capital annually by 2035 (BeZero, 2025).

Figure 1. Trajectory of Market Carbon values (GOV.UK, 2025)



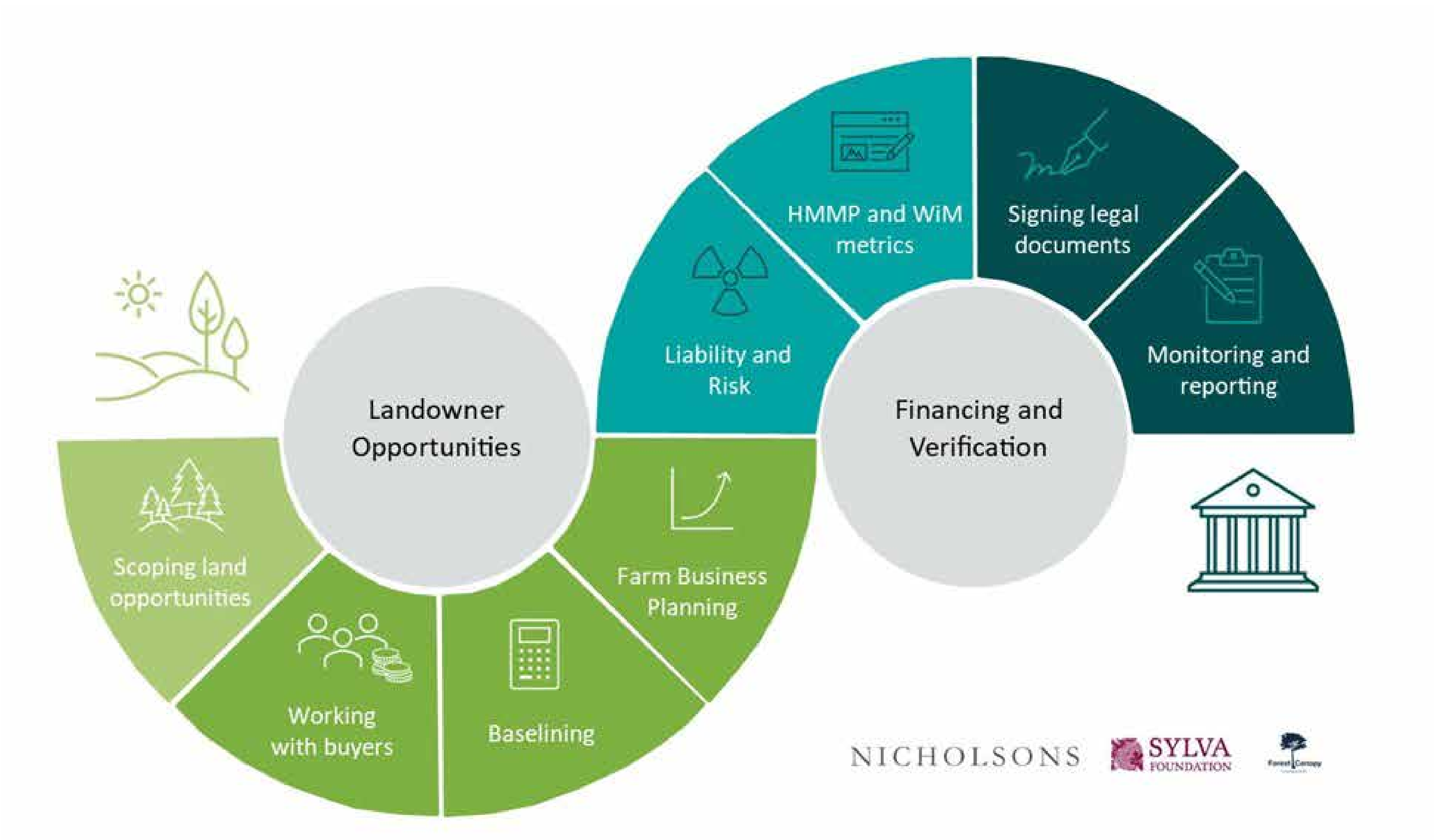


Figure 2. Overview of the process for BNG unit creation

Marketplace Update: Others

There are several emerging markets worth exploring on a site-by-site basis, including nutrient neutrality, flood mitigation, soil carbon, air quality, and societal benefits. The nutrient neutrality market, developed by Natural England, is relatively small and may become obsolete in the future. In contrast, flood mitigation and water quality markets are more economically viable and are best suited for landscape-scale initiatives that involve early engagement.

Additionally, enhancing supply chain resilience can encourage businesses to invest in land that directly impacts their supply chains. Green social prescribing, primarily funded by the public sector, represents another potential marketplace. However, it appears that this will continue to rely on public funding.

Our Advice

For a landowner:

- Firstly, we would advise determining what your personal aims are for the land
- Secondly, identify areas for potential habitat conversion and restoration. A basic landscape design may help to visualise these opportunities
- Next, undertake a baseline of your existing habitats - this will establish their current condition and potential market opportunities
- Source buyers based on your opportunities, be it through contacting local NGOs, seeking out businesses with a vested interest in the land, or identifying local BNG demand.

Developers often seek off-site providers or habitat banks to secure a mix of complex habitats – including woodlands – from a single source (GFI, 2024). Depending on this scoping, it may be more beneficial to engage with neighbouring landowners to support a larger-scale undertaking if the demand is present.

We create cost models over a 30-year period to estimate project costs and incomes. Additionally, assess and highlight areas where grant funding may be the most cost-effective option. Blending finance may be an option, or staging grant funding for establishment, followed by private finance for enhancement.

Final words

The government's commitments to nature, along with its inability to fulfil these commitments without private investment, create a strong likelihood that the natural capital marketplace will continue to grow. Although there are still questions about which "nature units" will be sold, we encourage landowners to explore their options. They should conduct baselining with a qualified ecologist, establish a clear monitoring plan to track improvements in habitat condition, and develop high-integrity projects. This approach will ensure that the units created are resilient, enabling landowners to take advantage of early opportunities.

References

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/factsheet-nature-restoration-fund

https://irp.cdn-website.com/99e150cd/files/uploaded/Roundtable+Discussion+Summary+Final.pdf

www.geplus.co.uk/digital-edition/ground-engineering-may-2025

https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/expanding-the-role-of-the-private-sector-in-nature-recovery/expanding-the-role-of-the-private-sector-in-nature-recovery-call-for-evidence

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/biodiversity-net-gain-for-nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects

https://www.edie.net/planned-shake-up-could-leave-biodiversity-net-gain-dead-in-the-water/

https://bezerocarbon.com/insights/from-risk-to-reward-making-the-uk-the-carbon-markets-capital-of-the-world

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traded-carbon-values-used-for-modelling-purposes-2024/traded-carbon-values-used-for-modelling-purposes-2024#changes-compared-to-2023-publication

https://sgradeckas.substack.com/p/deep-dive-biodiversity-credit-sales

https://airtable.com/appYGQNrpZp58kHIk/shrr0TtB9RIkLqG9Y/tblYk3kiEovv4DIVP/viwwsmvznmiooiu2E

https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-Credibility-Gap-for-Green-Finance-Jon-Hollingdale-19.08.2023.pdf

https://www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/insights-and-media/insights/brochures/bsi-flex-702-supply-of-biodiversity-benefits-specification/

https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/payments-schemes/elm/sustainable-farming-incentive-where-next-for-farmers

https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/payments-schemes/elm/sustainable-farming-incentive-where-next-for-farmers

https://sgradeckas.substack.com/p/deep-dive-biodiversity-credit-saleshttps://sgradeckas.substack.com/p/deep-dive-biodiversity-credit-sales

Sophie is a Senior Analyst in the Research team at Carter Jonas, reporting on market trends and themes across both the rural and commercial divisions.

Model Estate performance 2025

Sophie Davidson Sophie.Davidson@carterjonas.co.uk

The Model Estate report has been featured for more years than I can remember, lastly in 2024 Summer Terrier. It provides useful short and long-term trends and comparisons for asset classes typically managed by local authority surveyors.

About the Model Estate

The 'Model Estate' is a hypothetical agricultural estate created by Carter Jonas in 2010. The Estate has evolved over the years and comprises over 3,000 acres. It includes a combination of let and in-hand farms, a commercial and residential portfolio, a telecoms mast, fishing rights, a syndicate shoot, a solar farm, an Option to Lease for a 100MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), and a quarry. It is located within the geographical triangle bounded by the M4, M40 and M5 motorways.

In using the example of a mixed rural estate, similar in structure to many under the management of Carter Jonas, we gain an interesting and helpful insight into the performance of a rural estate and the dynamics at play. This enables us to make strategic recommendations for the future.

Please note that all findings in this report are based on valuations undertaken on 31 December 2024.

Overview performance

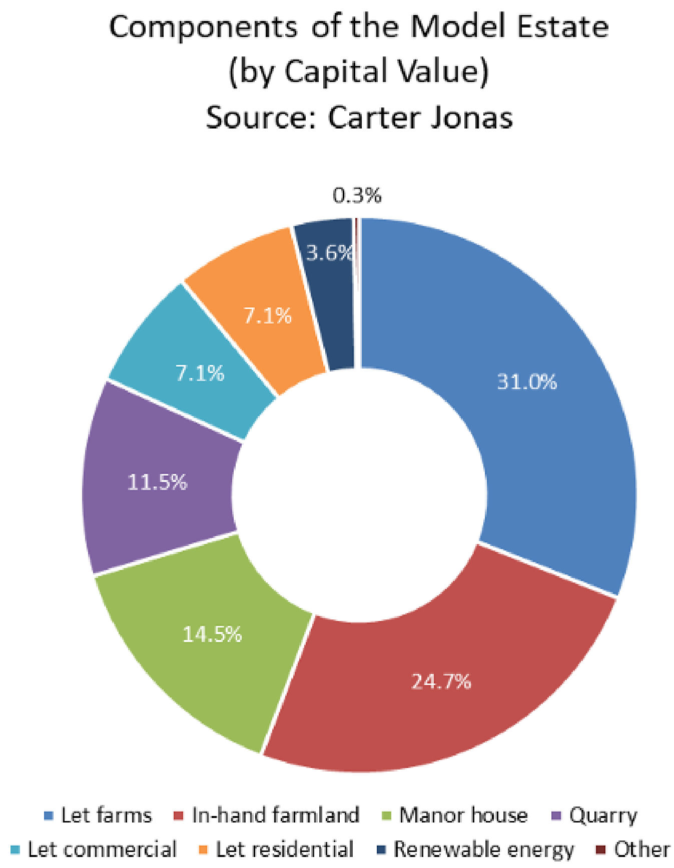
The overall valuation of the Model Estate totalled £53.92m in December 2024, representing an annual increase of 4.6% against a value of £51.54m in 2023. An acceleration in growth (up from 2.8% in 2023) offers a reassuring signal, suggesting underlying resilience as rural estates prepare for forthcoming policy changes.

Changes to Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR) from Inheritance Tax are set to take place in April 2026, which have created a pressing need for a proactive approach to estate planning, likely including an assessment of the estate's value and structure. Nonetheless, the data presented underscores buoyant investor sentiment, with an evolving value proposition that leverages the adaptable character of rural estates.

The 2024 growth surpasses the CPI inflation rate of 2.5% at the end of the year. Over the longer term, 10-year capital growth decelerated slightly but still returned an impressive 3.9% annualised growth rate, or 46.2% cumulatively. When adjusting for inflation, the Model Estate achieved a positive annualised growth rate of 0.8%, translating to an admirable overall increase of 8.4%.

While there was the expected variation in performance across the different assets, only the commercial portfolio ended the year in negative territory, albeit by a negligible -0.1%. The Estate's renewable energy assets were the top performer by year-on-year increase. As a result, their share of the Estate's overall value doubled from 1.8% to 3.6%. The quarry, which accounts for 11.5% of the Estate's value, also performed well, albeit more subdued than the previous two years.

Agricultural land remains a key component of the Estate's valuation, accounting for 55.8%, and so is a key determinant of value change. That said, this marks a significant change from the 68.7% recorded 10 years prior, attesting



to the growing trend of diversification on traditional estates. Both the in-hand and let farmland experienced notable growth over the year, reflecting the continued appeal of farmland assets. Driven by ongoing shortages in the rental sector (putting upward pressure on rents) and a recovering housing market, the let residential assets also delivered healthy gains. However, the value of the manor house and the 'other' assets maintained their value.

Component performance

Renewable energy: 113.1%

The Estate's renewable energy assets, comprising a solar farm and a BESS, achieved a standout 113.1% year-on-year value increase, reaffirming their status as the Estate's top performers.

The Estate reallocated 5 acres of arable farmland to a 100 MW BESS development last year. Due to the intermittent nature of renewable energy sources, there is a growing demand for BESS. An Option to Lease agreement was signed with a BESS developer. It has now received planning permission and the lease has been triggered. The full value of the BESS lease won't be realised until the site is operational with a track record. However, the hope value has increased significantly, indicating strong prospects for future gains.

Quarry: 5.0%

Quarry sales remained flat this year, falling short of productivity targets as anticipated market demand from housebuilding, commercial and infrastructure projects didn't fully materialise. Despite an 8% inflationary increase in lease revenues, lower productivity offset the expected gains.

Efforts to restore previously worked land at the quarry through infilling with inert waste materials have commenced, although it is expected that a 12-month period will be required to capture further market share for available inert waste materials. During this period, it is hoped that waste arisings will increase as bulk fill and soil materials generated by regional muck-away projects grow. Such growth depends on increased starts in development projects.

The capital value of the quarry has performed relatively well, maintaining an increase in reported annual growth, albeit starting to plateau due to underperforming markets and sales. A positive lease structure and rent review mechanism are mitigating some negative impacts, but full benefits await a recovery in market demand for mineral products.

Residential: 4.0%

The Estate's let residential assets appreciated by 4.0% year-on-year, accelerating from 1.4% the year before. While growth has moderated from the elevated levels of 2022 (when values increased by 15.8%), it remains robust, mirroring wider market dynamics.

At a national level, the housing market largely recovered from its downturn and had regained the losses seen by April 2024 after falling from July 2023. Meanwhile, tenant demand in the private rented sector is unprecedentedly high, illustrated in elevated levels of rental growth. Rent reviews on the Estate have resulted in rental uplifts of 9.0%, reflecting national increases reported by the Office for National Statistics.

Looking forward, downward pressure on pricing could arise from new and anticipated policy changes, impacting investor appetite and the viability of holding older assets. The Renters' Rights Bill proposes several key changes, such as the abolition of no-fault evictions and fixed-term tenancies, and the introduction of rent control measures.

The government is also proposing to increase the minimum EPC rating for rental properties from E to C for new tenancies from 2028, and all existing tenancies from 2030. Rural estate cottages are categorised by their traditional construction and often present energy efficiency challenges. Addressing these may incur significant capital expenditure and outweigh the financial benefits of holding the property. Estate owners may therefore consider the disposal of off-lying properties.

Let farms: 3.2%

The value of the let farmland increased by 3.2% over the year, picking up pace from 2.1% growth the year before. This is largely due to a stark supply and demand imbalance in land to rent, and despite uncertainties in the wider farmland market and more subdued growth in commercial arable and pasture land values.

The latest data from Defra shows that land rented on Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) tenancies has continued its downward trend. In the 12 months to June 2024, the area of land rented on AHAs fell by 2.1%, following a 3.6% decline the year before. The area of land rented on Farm Business Tenancies (FBT) also fell, but by a more moderate 0.3%, following a 1.0% drop the previous year. This suggests that land on AHA tenancies that ended with no successor was not necessarily re-let on a new FBT.

Driven by the potential financial returns of non-agricultural uses, landowners are increasingly removing land from the rental market for alternatives. While the impact of evolving policies and schemes on the sector unfolds, land management patterns will likely continue to shift as landowners evaluate their economic benefits (both in income and capital gains).

Changes to APR and BPR present further potential for a decline in the let farm sector. The Tenant Farmers Association expressed concerns that tenant farms will be brought in-hand to increase the proportion of trading assets (relative to investment assets, as per the Balfour principle) to maximise BPR and reduce tax liabilities. It may also be the case that tenanted land will be sold to cover tax bills.

As such, it is no surprise that rents continue to push upwards. Nationally, rents on FBTs increased by 2.7% in the year to March 2024 (Defra). Regionally, in Southern England, our own dataset suggests that openly marketed FBT rents tend to exceed national averages.

<u>In-hand farmland: 3.0%</u>

The Estate's in-hand farmland portfolio saw a 3.0% year-on-year uplift, continuing its four-year upward trend. This performance, while slightly below last year's 3.4% growth, indicates the ongoing resilience of the land market in the face of structural change and economic volatility. Given farmland's substantial portion of the Estate's total value, its gains were a key driver of the year's overall growth.

The value of the in-hand arable land has risen from £10,250/acre to £10,500/acre, representing a 2.4% increase, while the in-hand pasture land increased from £8,732/acre to £9,000/acre, a 3.2% increase. Alongside the agricultural land, the in-hand portfolio includes a farmhouse and 60 acres of woodland. The farmhouse saw its value increase by 5.2%, broadly in line with national house price growth for detached houses (5.0% as per HM Land Registry), and the woodland increased in value by 4.9% overall.

The in-hand farmland outpaces national trends for average arable and pasture land. Land values are becoming increasingly polarised, with higher-quality land in desirable locations increasing at a faster rate. This trend accelerated in 2024, with uncertainties arising from the change in government and the potential of shifting political priorities, creating sensitivity in pricing in some parts of the market. Conversely, there is sustained demand for well-positioned assets from an array of buyers, notably rollover funds benefiting from Business Asset Rollover Relief (particularly in the southern regions).

<u>Manor House: 0.0%</u>

The market for large country houses in the UK has been cautious, with some buyers who require finance still hesitant to invest more capital while borrowing costs remain high. Recent changes to the 'non-dom' regime and other changes to tax policy (including increases to the rates of Capital Gains Tax and Agricultural and Business Property Relief) have tempered sentiment at the upper end of the market.

While those houses that have come to the market have been met with sufficient interest, primarily from cash-rich buyers, they have generally sold at their guide prices, resulting in stable values. As such, the value of the Estate's manor house and accompanying gardens has held firm for the third year in a row.

<u>Other: 0.0%</u>

The value of the sporting rights, telecoms mast and fishing rights have also held firm over the last year. These assets continue to generate a steady income, with an overall yield of 13.0%.

<u>Commercial: -0.1%</u>

The Estate's commercial assets saw a slight dip in value this year, continuing a trend of marginal decreases for the third consecutive year. This fractional decrease underlines the relative stability of the UK commercial property sector compared to recent years, which has been facing varying degrees of structural change and subsequent price adjustments.

Formerly agricultural buildings, the Estate's commercial portfolio comprises fully let office and industrial assets. Rents stand at £14.50/sq ft for the office assets, while rents for the industrial assets vary from £3.72/sq ft for a former aircraft hangar to £6.25/sq ft for a workshop unit, all unchanged from 2023.

The office market is showing signs of recovery. After increasing since 2020, office vacancy rates now look close to peaking, and office occupancy rates have also shown a modest improvement (Remit Consulting). Coupled with the cost-effectiveness and appeal of the natural surroundings that rural offices offer, this should positively impact investor sentiment and help maintain the Estate's office asset values.

Yet, downside risks remain, particularly as the shift to prime, city-centre space with sustainability credentials continues. This trend is being accelerated by the next round of tightening to minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) regulations, with a minimum EPC rating of C due to take effect from April 2027. Many rural properties will need upgrades to meet compliance standards, and some estates may choose to repurpose or sell off assets where capital expenditure cannot be justified by the expected rent.

Although industrial vacancy rates have been rising over recent quarters, attributable to a combination of slowing demand and rising supply of available space, vacancy at the national level now appears to be levelling off. With a robust outlook for demand and relatively little new supply coming through, we think vacancy will peak this year and begin to decline, which is encouraging for those with an industrial portfolio.

That said, like offices, demand for industrial units is also focused on prime, energy-efficient space, particularly as many operators are promoting their ability to maximise their clients' sustainability credentials within the supply chain. Given the strong underlying demand conditions, we expect continued rental growth for industrial space over the next 12 months, depending on the type, quality and location of the property.

Ed – The Model Estate report 2025 does not include the usual comparison to other asset types. Markets have been very turbulent and reporting would be dated quickly. Sophie has indicated that she hopes to pick this up later in the year.

154

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

WE HAVE ACTED FOR 154 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Our specialists have an in-depth understanding of the day-to-day operational requirements of local authorities which allows us to provide tailored estate advisory services to meet your operational needs. The strategic and planning advisory services we offer are supported by the practical implementation of agreed strategies, using informed market knowledge and expertise gained through the successful delivery of transformative projects.

To discuss your current requirements, please contact:

Alexandra Houghton, Head of Public Sector
alexandra.houghton@carterjonas.co.uk | 07880 004520

OUR LOCAL AUTHORITY EXPERIENCE:

3,500 assets assessed using our Location & Asset Strategy Review methodology

4 joint venture partner procurement exercises undertaken in the past 24 months

2,691 tenancies under management

8 estate regeneration CPOs currently being advised on across 5 local authorities

12 local authorities we provide annual asset valuations for

JOURNEY TO CHARTERSHIP

Insights from Sarah and Nyasha navigating the APC Pathway

Adam Quinn aquinn@rics.org

Adam is Member Pipeline Specialist for Candidates at RICS

For our FACES colleagues and their mentors, Adam has been talking to two recently qualified members to hear their stories and insights - Sarah Palmer MRICS and Nyasha Ndoro MRICS.

Achieving MRICS status is a significant milestone in any property professional's career. We wanted to gain more insight into the journey to MRICS, and how professionals juggle this with their day job, as well as sharing tips for aspiring candidates.

Adam has been talking to two recently qualified members to hear their stories, Sarah Palmer MRICS, Senior Chartered Building Surveyor at Kendall Kingscott Ltd and Nyasha Ndoro MRICS, Executive Surveyor at Gardiner & Theobald LLP.

Sarah's story

In 2017 I embarked on a career change (having previously worked for the Heritage Lottery Fund for several years) and started a Post Graduate Diploma in Building Surveying at the University of West England. While studying, in 2019, I started working as a Trainee Building Surveyor and enrolled onto the APC. Having completed my studies in February 2020 I was ready to really focus on building my experience, but COVID struck and I was furloughed for 4 months! Although this did delay my progression somewhat, I was able to get the experience I needed to submit in March 2023 and sit my final assessment interview in June of the same year to become a Chartered Building Surveyor.

What strategy did you use to structure your Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) submission, and how did you ensure it reflected the required competencies effectively?

To assist in preparing my APC submission, I referred back to my Structured Training Diary and the RICS Building Surveying Pathway Guide to consider which projects would be most suitable to discuss in my Summary of Experience. I was able to align my experience to ensure it was relevant and demonstrated how I met the relevant competency.

When preparing my Case Study I referred to the RICS Candidate Guide which assisted with the structure and content. I met with my counsellor and mentor regularly to discuss potential case study projects and key issues that would be suitable. When I was ready to write my case study, I was clear on what I needed to say and how to articulate it in a way to make a good impression on the assessment panel.

Looking back, what was the most challenging part of the assessment process for you, and how did you overcome it?
For me, the most challenging aspect was my confidence and having self-belief. Colleagues kept telling me I was ready and that I could do it, but I really struggled to believe in my own abilities. For the first few months after becoming chartered I remember thinking it was all a mistake and I would get an email saying there had been an administrative error.

The support and encouragement from my colleagues really helped me to improve my confidence ahead of my final assessment interview. All the mock interviews and Q&A sessions really helped me know my submission inside out and prepared me for the sorts of questions the assessment panel might ask.

Becoming a Chartered Building Surveyor was also a real confidence boost and in the two years since I've been able to grow as a surveyor and my self-belief has improved tremendously.

How did you prepare for the final assessment interview, and what techniques helped you feel confident and perform well under pressure?
One of the first things I did was to find out if anyone else from my university cohort was sitting their final assessment interview in the same session. I was lucky enough to find a friend within a much larger company who had formed a study group with 4 of her colleagues and they kindly let me join. At the time of my submission I was the only candidate at my company who was sitting during that session, so I found it really beneficial to be in touch with others going through the same process. We met regularly on TEAMs for Q&A sessions which were really invaluable in getting the exposure to what types of questions may be asked during my final assessment interview.

I spent a lot of time revising and learning my submission documentation. I created mind maps and revision cards which I now use to create workshop content for others going through the APC process within Kendall Kingscott. I was given study leave to ensure I had the time to dedicate to revising, which made a huge difference as workload commitments can often make it difficult to prioritise your time.

I also did a number of mock interviews with senior members of staff and lots of Q&A sessions to make sure I was ready.

Were there any specific resources, mentors, or support networks that made a significant difference in your APC journey?
I found numerous free resources available online including the SurveYOUR and RICS podcasts along with the DeLever and Property Elite websites [Ed – see regular articles in ACES' Terriers from Jen Lemen at Property Elite]. I also attended an RICS Candidate Support Session which was really beneficial.

My colleagues, mentor and counsellor made a significant difference, particularly in the lead up to the final assessment interview. I'm so grateful to those that gave up their time after work to do Q&A sessions with me, it really made such a difference.

What one piece of advice would you give someone starting the MRICS pathway today that you wish you had known from the beginning?
I think it's really important to focus on your mandatory competencies from the outset, to ensure you understand your ethical obligations and the aspects of being a chartered surveyor that you may not get exposed to on a day to day basis. There are a lot of free resources available online, so start getting to grips with them as soon as you enroll. I also think it's key to have a good network of colleagues and peers around you and to get involved in your local Matrics community as they offer CPD opportunities and APC events.

If like Sarah you want to find out more about Matrics, their networks and events RICS Matrics UK

Nyasha's story

I'm a chartered surveyor recently awarded the MRICS designation via the Quantity Surveying and Construction pathway. I've worked in the property industry for 12 years, and I was a RICS Candidate for approximately 6 years before successfully completing my APC. My professional interests include cost estimation, risk management, procurement, contract law, and project management, sustainable development, valuation and asset management. I'm passionate about supporting aspiring professionals on their journey to chartership.

What strategy did you use to structure your APC submission, and how did you ensure it reflected the required competencies effectively?

Author Adam Quinn speaking in Cardiff

I approached my submission with clarity and alignment in mind. I began by thoroughly reviewing the RICS pathway guide to understand each competency's requirements. Then I created a mapping document to link my real-life project experience to each competency. I ensured every example provided clear context, my specific role, and how I demonstrated the required behaviours. I also sought regular feedback from my counsellor to ensure alignment with RICS expectations.

Looking back, what was the most challenging part of the assessment process for you, and how did you overcome it?
The most challenging part was balancing work commitments with the preparation required for the final submission. To manage this, I developed a structured timeline and allocated weekly slots specifically for writing, reviewing, and studying. I treated the process like a project with deadlines, milestones, and regular check-ins with my supervisor who helped me stay on track and avoid last-minute stress.

How did you prepare for the final assessment interview, and what techniques helped you feel confident and perform well under pressure?
Mock interviews were essential to my preparation. I scheduled several with colleagues and mentors, simulating real interview conditions. I also practiced articulating my submission and answering competency-based questions aloud. To manage pressure, I focused on what I could control: knowing my submission inside out, staying calm, and treating the interview as a conversation rather than an interrogation.

Were there any specific resources, mentors, or support networks that made a significant difference in your APC journey?
Yes, I was fortunate to have a supportive APC counsellor who provided regular feedback and encouragement. I also engaged with an MRICS study group, which offered a great platform for sharing insights and practicing questions. Additionally, I used RICS resources such as the pathway guide, APC webinars, and templates, which gave me a clear understanding of what assessors look for.

What one piece of advice would you give someone starting the MRICS pathway today that you wish you had known from the beginning?
Start documenting your experience early and consistently. Don't wait until the final stages to write your submission. Regularly reflect on your work and how it links to competencies. This will make your submission much smoother and reduce stress closer to your assessment. Also, don't underestimate the power of mock interviews, they're invaluable in building confidence and refining your responses.

If like Nyasha you now want to give back at RICS we have lots of opportunities where we need Inspire Ambassadors to continue the cycle of support and engage with future talent. Inspire future surveyors

RICS is here to support all candidates through their journey, we offer an array of online and face to face support Candidate support sessions - UK & Ireland or get in touch contactrics@rics.org

Ed – For young surveyors, please link into the FACES community in ACES, if you are not already engaged. See Neil's article and contact details in this issue)

Jen is a partner and co-founder of Property Elite.

APC ASSESSORS

Tips for APC assessors

Jen Lemen BSc (Hons) FRICS jen@property-elite.co.uk

This is the third part of a series of articles Jen has agreed to write. Here she encourages readers to become APC assessors. "We all assess for love, not money, and it is one of the most rewarding experiences out there."

APC training and applying

In my last ACES article, I wrote about how to be a fantastic APC ally, as a counsellor, supervisor or mentor, particularly when delivering e-mock interviews. In this article, we will look at how to advance your APC support role by becoming an assessor.

Being an APC assessor is essentially a voluntary role – you are paid a nominal fee to cover your time, which many assessors decide to donate to the RICS LionHeart charity.

Training to become an APC assessor has so many benefits though:

- Supporting the next generation of chartered surveyors
- Giving back to the profession
- Networking with other assessors
- Providing a fair, consistent and robust APC interview process
- Enhancing your own skills and knowledge
- Keeping up to date with the latest hot topics, RICS guidance and legislation
- Giving you the knowledge to support your own team or other surveyors
- Making you a better APC counsellor, supervisor or mentor
- Adding to your formal CPD hours when assessing or attending assessor training
- Adding to your informal CPD hours when acquiring new knowledge to assess competently
- Providing evidence for one of the FRICS fellowship characteristics.

We all assess for love, not money, and it is one of the most rewarding experiences out there. We all remember our own APC interview and the nerves, anxiety and pressure we felt. You will be part of someone else's APC journey and you can make the final hurdle a positive environment for them to succeed in.

We are neither gatekeepers nor examiners, in the traditional sense – we are there to assess a candidate's competence: have they given sound advice, taken robust actions, and have appropriate knowledge across a relevant range of competencies?

You can apply to become an assessor via the RICS website (https://www.rics.org/contribute/support-future-surveyors/become-an-assessor). You need to have been qualified for at least two years, have a clean disciplinary record and no CPD sanctions in force.

There are, in fact, a number of different assessor roles that you can apply for, alongside being an APC interview assessor. These are:

- AssocRICS assessor
- APC Preliminary Review assessor
- APC chairperson
- Senior Professional Assessment and Specialist Assessment assessor (following initial assessor training).

By becoming an APC assessor, you are committing to assess a minimum of four interviews each year. This could be one full day or interviews on separate days, if taking a day out of your working calendar is challenging. Your agreement to this is formalised in the RICS Assessor Commitment (https://www.rics.org/content/dam/ricsglobal/documents/surveying/Assessor-Chairperson-Service-Level-Agreement_March-2023-Update.pdf), which you must sign in order to begin assessing.

This also confirms your agreement to:

- Be audited regularly
- Meet key deadlines, e.g., provision of notes in the event of a candidate appealing the interview outcome
- Pass the RICS Professionalism Module every three years
- Undertake refresher training every three years or as required by RICS
- Only assess the pathways you are competent to assess, which is typically one to four pathways, at once (at the higher end where they are closely related)
- dentify and declare potential assessor conflicts of interest.

The last point is key to providing a transparent assessment process. Examples of conflicts of interest include not assessing a candidate where:

- You have provided any form of mentoring or coaching
- You have a close or familial relationship with them
- You have a commercial interest in the candidate passing their APC interview.

If you are ever in doubt, the RICS Assessment Delivery Team is there to provide guidance and support.

The interview

The online format of the interviews has made it a lot easier for a diverse range of assessors to get involved. The time and cost implications of the previous in person format perhaps limited the diversity of the assessor pool, although there were clear benefits in having face to face contact with your panel and candidates.

Being an assessor doesn't just require your time on interview day. You will also need to:

- Access the APC Assessment Platform to record availability and access assessment information, such as candidate documents and panel members
- Review candidate submissions
- Prepare competency-based questions
- Contribute to the pass/refer decision on interview day
- Contribute to candidate feedback/ referral report.

Your assessor training will cover all of these elements and give you the confidence and competence to assess fairly, consistently and robustly.

The interview must last for exactly 60 minutes – no less and no more, unless the candidate has any access arrangements or special considerations where additional time may be allowed by RICS [Ed – see 2025 Spring Terrier].

When preparing for your first (or 100th!) APC assessment, here are some top tips:

- Skim read the candidate's submission first to get a feel for their experience, role and scope of competence
- Although RICS will have carried out basic checks, ensure you also check that the submission is suitable for assessment at interview. This could include the required number and level of competencies, completeness of the submission and CPD hours and formal proportion
- Then, read it again (and again) when preparing your assessment approach and potential lines of questioning. Generally, the questioning will take its own path, and you will need to think on your feet for follow on questions. Therefore, preparing a black and white list of questions you will ask is not best practice
- Make notes about the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, although try not to form too much of a view beforehand – give the candidate every chance to perform well and succeed on the day
- Ensure you are familiar and competent to assess the candidate's pathway and declared competencies.

In the interview, here's some tips to ensure you are applying best practice:

- Start questioning at the highest level the candidate has declared
- Avoid hypothetical questions
- Avoid questions with multiple parts – keep them simple and to the point
- Assess the candidate at the level they should be at; not at the level of an experienced practitioner, i.e., have they shown competence to the required level across their stated competencies
- Ensure that you are aware of and stick to the strict interview timings. Your chair will be managing this, but everything you can do to assist them will be helpful
- Ask open questions, giving the candidate the opportunity to explain their advice or actions and demonstrate their competence
- Avoid closed questions, unless you need to confirm facts or information
- Stay alert, even when you are not questioning the candidate!
- Use encouraging follow-up questions and work with the candidate if they are nervous (no doubt you might be nervous too, particularly if it's your first time assessing). Using the candidate's name and good eye contact can be helpful to build a connection and re-ground a candidate if they are struggling
- Avoid indicating to a candidate if an answer is right or wrong, such as nodding your head or saying 'yes' or 'well done'
- Take notes, as these will aid you when considering your final pass or refer decision. Try to avoid making them distracting. Your notes may also be required in the event of a referral or appeal
- Dress to impress: a professional appearance and attire is a must. Professional conduct is also essential – treat the candidate as you would want to be treated. Avoid anything that is disrespectful, including sighing or eye rolling, and keep a check on your body language
- Practise active listening, which can avoid misunderstandings and ensure your questioning is clear and concise.

Good luck assessing in 2025 – enjoy the experience and do your best for your candidates and fellow panel members!

Donna has some 30 years of experience in the property industry, both in private practice and local government. Her experience is currently being utilised within the profession support and assurance (valuation) team at RICS where her role is to support, coach and regulate Registered Valuers into compliance with RICS professional rules and standards.

VALUER REGISTRATION SCHEME

Local authority valuers and the valuer registration scheme

Donna Best, FRICS dbest@rics.org

For colleagues involved in valuation, Donna gives you some advice on the VRS and registration scheme options.

Are you a Registered Valuer working within a local authority with responsibility for undertaking Red Book valuations? If yes, then this article may be of interest to you.

When the Valuer Registration Scheme (VRS) first came into effect, I was working in a local authority and like so many, assumed that we needed to register the council as a registered firm. After a year working at RICS, it has become clear that this assumption was incorrect. I have drafted this article to assist anyone else who may be under this misapprehension.

Does Valuer Registration apply to me?

If you are a member of RICS and undertake Red Book valuations, then you must also register as an individual under the RICS Valuers Registration Scheme.

Where there are Registered Valuers working for a local authority, does the local authority need to become a 'registered firm'?

Not necessarily. Most councils fall into the category of Not for Profit Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisations (SPONROs). This applies to local authorities that do not offer valuation services to fee paying clients. These authorities can register with RICS as SPONRO firms and 'sponsor' their Registered Valuers employees. They are not RICS Regulated firms.

What are the benefits of being a Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisation?

- Payment of sponsored valuer registration subscriptions and application fees directly to RICS on behalf of Registered Valuer employees
- The same discounted fee structure offered to RICS Regulated Firms, reducing the overall cost of registering multiple valuers.

What are the obligations of being a Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisation?

Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisations are required to provide any information which is 'reasonably requested' by RICS to support registration applications and ongoing regulatory compliance monitoring on behalf of sponsored valuers.

This translates to the submission of an annual application form. Although the title of the form is 'Application for Firm Registration,' it does not mean a 'Registered Firm' in the regulatory scheme sense. This form requires the follow information:

- A regulatory contact, usually one of the Registered Valuers or RICS members working for the authority
- The name and address of the authority
- Details of the council's PII underwriters. If the authority says

that that the corporate insurance is adequate and appropriate for the work undertaken by their valuers, that will be sufficient to meet requirements. The insurance policy does not have to comply with RICS requirements

- Details of the complaints handling procedure. Here, the corporate arrangements will be deemed sufficient. In practice, most authorities will refer to the Local Government Ombudsman for local and central government departments only.

How do I register my authority as a SPONRO?

RICS professionals can register via your account here Your account - RICS. On the regulation tab, apply for firm regulation and the option will be given to be a SPONRO. As part of the registration process the applicant will be asked to select the number of Registered Valuers they wish to sponsor.

Once registration is complete, the applicant can access a unique Sponsorship Code which must be provided to all sponsored individuals. The Sponsorship Code can be used multiple times based on the number of sponsorships requested during the application process. Additional sponsorships can be purchased as required.

Sponsored Registered Valuers will need to enter the Sponsorship Code as part of their individual registration application and at each annual renewal.

A new Sponsorship Code will be provided to each Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisation as part of the registration renewal process each year. It is important that renewal is completed on time to ensure valid Sponsorship Codes are available to the sponsored Registered Valuers.

For further information, please see Guide to Sponsoring Non-Regulated Organisations

What am I required to do as an Individual Registered Valuer?

Each individual Registered Valuer working within a local authority needs to complete an annual renewal form application for RICS Valuer Registration. This form requires the follow information:

- The firm sponsorship code
- Professional indemnity arrangements - here, for the Scheme purposes, the council's blanket policy will usually suffice where the valuer is only providing valuation advice for the use of the authority
- Complaints handling procedures - the scheme rules require that individual Register Valuers need to have an appropriate complaints handling procedure with alternative dispute provision. However, if the valuer is only providing valuation advice for the use of the authority, their client, then it would be deemed appropriate that a separate complaints handling procedure *would not* be required in addition to the council's corporate procedures
- Valuer Registration (Individuals) Answers - information relating to the valuation work undertaken by the valuer over the previous 12 months
- Eligibility Conditions - confirmation from the valuer that they have achieved the required valuation competency requirements or have jointed through an approved direct entry route.

Where can I get further information?

For further information, please contact regulation@rics.org.

Donna has some 30 years of experience in the property industry, both in private practice and local government. Her experience is currently being utilised within the profession support and assurance (valuation) team at RICS where her role is to support, coach and regulate Registered Valuers into compliance with RICS professional rules and standards.

RED BOOK VALUATIONS

Local authority accounting - asset valuations and the Red Book

Donna Best, FRICS dbest@rics.org

In a second article from Donna, here she prepares frequently asked questions and answers, and also alerts valuers to a free webinar workshop about Red Book compliance.

The Profession Support & Assurance team within RICS Regulation runs a Red Book compliance workshop. It's free to attend and provides 3½ hours formal CPD.

This live workshop webinar is a great opportunity to engage with the RICS and ask questions or make comment in respect of any current Red Book queries and/or issues relating to RICS Rules of Conduct and best practice. Over the last few months, we have collated questions received in relation to local authority asset valuations and are now pleased to share these with the ACES membership.

Who can undertake local authority asset valuations?

The CIPFA Code of practice on local authority accounting (The CIPFA Code) requires that the valuations are undertaken by a qualified valuer. The definition of a qualified valuer is *"a person conducting the valuations who holds a recognised and relevant professional qualification and having sufficient current local and national knowledge of the particular market, and the skills and understanding to undertake the valuation competently".*

If you are a member of RICS, you must be a Registered Valuer to meet the 'qualified valuer' criteria.

If I am an in-house valuer and member of RICS, do I need to be a Registered Valuer?

If you are a Chartered or Associate Member of RICS and carrying out valuation work other than that included in the exceptions listed the Red Book PS 1, section 5, then yes, you need to be a Registered Valuer in compliance with the RICS Valuer Registration Scheme [Ed – see Donna's previous article].

I am an in-house valuer and commission asset valuations. Do I need to be a Registered Valuer to present the report to the Finance Department?

In this circumstance, you are acting as the client and commissioning the work from an external valuer who has signed off the valuations and is the 'responsible valuer'. Where this is the case, then no, you would not need to be a registered valuer.

Does a local authority asset valuation prepared for financial statements need to comply with mandatory Red Book requirements?

Yes. Compliance with PS 1, PS 2 and

VPSs 1-6 within the global standards is mandatory for any member of RICS or RICS-regulated firm involved in undertaking or supervising valuation services by the provision of written valuation advice.

This is because the valuations are provided for inclusion in a published document in which the public has an interest and/or upon which third parties may rely. In addition, The CIPFA Code requires that valuations are carried out in accordance with current RICS Valuation – Global Standards: UK national supplement (Red Book).

A key benefit of the Red Book, as well as providing a framework for valuation activity, is that it is also a risk management tool for surveyors. Compliance will ensure that an all-important audit trail is put in place. This in turn will assist the defence of any challenge to the valuation work undertaken.

What about other valuation activity (not asset valuations) that are undertaken as an in-house valuer for a local authority?

Professional Standards 1 and 2 are mandatory in all cases when members are providing valuation advice in a written form. However, there are some types of valuation activity where the mandatory application of VPSs 1-6 may be unsuitable or inappropriate. The circumstances where VPSs 1-6 are not of mandatory application are:

a. Providing an agency or brokerage service in respect of the acquisition or disposal of one or more assets
b. Providing valuation advice expressly in preparation for, or during, negotiations or impending litigation, including where the valuer is acting on the behalf of others, representing their interests or needs
c. Acting or preparing to act as an expert witness
d. Performing statutory functions (e.g. right to buy valuations)
e. Providing valuations to a client purely for internal purposes, on express contractual terms that exclude the valuer's liability, and without communication to a third party.

In such cases, members may advise that a valuation was performed in accordance with Red Book Global Standards on an excepted basis.

Even though the content of VPS 1 (which sets out the matters to be addressed in terms of engagement – scope of work) may not be mandatory in 'exception' cases, terms of engagement are still required and they must be clear, unambiguous and appropriately documented.

In practical terms for internal valuers, it is recommended that where providing reports to decision makers, that members make the following clear:

- The purpose and use of the advice
- That the advice is for the authority's internal purposes only and that no third party may rely on the advice
- Clear exclusion of valuer's liability.

Essentially, 'the client' (the local authority decision makers), need to fully understand the nature, limitations and extent of the advice they receive.

Whenever valuation advice is given, the principles set out in the Red Book should be observed to the fullest extent possible.

Am I correct that rotation of valuers in local authorities is different from that of rotation in the private sector?

Yes you are correct. The requirements in respect of regulatory valuations, as set out in the UK supplement, do not apply to in-house local authority valuers. Following work recently undertaken by the 'public sector valuation rotation working group', the recommendation arising from their report was that this remains the case. Specifically, the recommendation was:

"Public sector investment property valuations for financial reporting should not be considered as regulated purpose valuations under the RPV definition of RICS Valuation – Global Standards: UK national supplement 2023."

This recommendation has been approved by the Standards and Regulation Board, the Valuation Assurance Committee and the Knowledge and Practice Committee. For further information, please visit Public Sector Valuations.

The relevant requirements for all valuers, including those working within a local authority, are as set out in PS 2, 5.4 Rotation policy and 5.5 Time as signatory.

Where the valuation is of an asset(s) previously valued by the member or the RICS-regulated firm for any purpose, there are also specific disclosures that must be made in the terms of engagement, the report and any published reference to the valuation as set out under PS 2 5 *Disclosures where the public has an interest or upon which third parties may rely* (page 29).

Presumably an in-house valuer doesn't need to undertake a conflict of interest check?

No this presumption is incorrect as all members must follow the current edition of RICS' Conflicts of interest. This involves the identification of any previous involvement and any related management of conflicts of interest (See PS 2 3). This links to requirements around independence and objectivity.

There are also specific requirements set out under PS 2 5.6 in relation to previous involvement (page 33).

Just to clarify - this means the report must make clear any involvement of previous valuations for LA assets?

Yes – where the valuation of an asset has previously been valued by the member (or the member's firm), for the same purpose. This must be stated in the terms of engagement and the report, along with the policy on rotation.

When signing off reports prepared by other valuers in my team, what evidence do I need to demonstrate adequate supervision?

Where signing reports prepared by other individuals and are therefore the 'responsible valuer', you are accepting responsibility not only for the opinion of value, but compliance with RICS professional standards. You must therefore be able to demonstrate adequate supervision of the valuation and answer any questions that may arise.

There are no mandatory requirements dictating what adequate supervision might look like, but essentially, the responsible valuer's 'fingerprints' (and in essence the full audit trail) need to be all over the file. Examples might include:

- A site inspection note record that the valuer was in attendance, or details of when the valuer last inspected the property
- A copy of tracked changes to a reviewed initial report draft
- Email correspondence requesting amendments or further information
- Minutes of a meeting between the valuer and the person being supervised.

Where can I find assistance to meet RICS standards?

There are a number of framework documents available on the RICS Best Practice for Registered Valuers webpage. These framework documents include terms of engagement, report, conflict of interest and previous involvement recording and, site notes and valuation reasoning. These are provided to assist members with Red Book compliance and best practice.

Where can I get further information about the RICS Red Book compliance workshop?

Please visit RICS Red Book Compliance Workshop to book onto the free online webinar.

COMPULSORY PURCHASE
Client Commissioning

Jeremy Pilgrim, Michele Vas and Thomas Horner michele.vas@dentons.com thomas.horner@dentons.com

Jeremy commissioned this article based on his CPO experience and Michele and Thomas added the legal detail. They outline recent changes, the CPO process, and government's intentions. "Considering all of this, it is clear that the government believes that there is an opportunity to use compulsory purchase more readily to speed up and unlock housing delivery in the UK."

Jeremy is a Past President of ACES and a member of ACES Council.

Michele specialises in advising on large-scale energy and transport infrastructure, the delivery of new towns and garden communities, and securing CPO regeneration projects. Specialist areas also include negotiating and drafting planning and highways agreements, town centre regeneration and redevelopment schemes, urban extensions, compulsory purchase orders, road closure orders, highways issues, judicial review, public inquiry work and enforcement issues. Michele is rated as a "Leading Partner" by Legal 500 UK 2025.

Thomas is an associate in the Planning and Public Law team in London. He qualified in September 2024 after completing his training contract with Winckworth Sherwood LLP. Thomas has experience advising on infrastructure projects, including rail and ports, through the promotion of transport and works act orders, development consent orders and harbour revision orders.

Context

The role of property asset manager in the public sector has become more demanding in recent years and the asset surveyor is expected to undertake many varied roles, from professional matters, landlord and tenant, CPOs, to acquisitions/disposals, regeneration and property management - to name but a few.

Increasingly the asset manager, in the capacity of client commissioning, is expected to advise members and directors, on commissioning complex programmes. One such area is commissioning CPOs and this is increasing. CPOs are highly complex and should not be undertaken without detailed advice from both lawyers and surveyors well practiced in this specialist area.

In order for in-house property teams to provide advice, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the process. To be able to advise on the process and assess whether the initial proposals have a realistic chance of succeeding is desirable. Remember this is a long process and it is important at the initial stage that both management and members, particularly Cabinet, are supportive and will remain so throughout the process. By its nature, compulsory purchase is divisive and will create opposition and complaints and this can weaken resolve if due diligence and following the process are not followed.

I hope the following notes provide a useful guide to the process of achieving a successful outcome for a compulsory purchase. I am very grateful for support and advice from Michelle Vas and in particular Tom Horner of Denton's in preparing this note.

What is compulsory purchase?

Compulsory purchase is the legal process by which certain bodies, including local planning authorities, (the acquiring authorities) can acquire third party rights to land without the consent of the owner via a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has produced comprehensive guidance on the compulsory purchase process (MHCLG Guidance) – most recently updated on 31 January 2025, in light of legislative changes introduced by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. MGCLG Guidance confirms that compulsory purchase powers are *"an important tool to use as a means of assembling land to help deliver social, environmental and economic change. Used properly, they can contribute towards effective and efficient urban and rural regeneration, essential infrastructure, the revitalisation of communities, and the promotion of business – leading to improvements in quality of life."*

Acquiring authorities should only use compulsory purchase powers where there is a compelling case in the public interest to make a CPO (established in Chesterfield Properties Plc v Sec of State (1998)). A CPO must be able to justify its inherent interference with the human rights of those with an interest in the land affected.

Proving the compelling case in the public interest requires a significant degree of justification which will turn on the facts of each case. MHCLG Guidance states that, *"the confirming authority [(i.e., the authority that decides whether to confirm, modify or reject the order] has to be able to take a balanced view between the intentions of the acquiring authority and the concerns* *of those with an interest in the land that it is proposing to acquire compulsorily and the wider public interest. The more comprehensive the justification which the acquiring authority can present, the stronger its case is likely to be."*

Crucially, however, before looking to justify use of a CPO, the acquiring authority should ensure that it has chosen the right enabling power permitting it to apply for an order. Acquiring authorities should look to use the most specific power available for the purpose in mind and only use a general power when a specific power is not available.

What is the UK government's view of compulsory purchase?

In the government's manifesto for the 2024 General Election, it committed to reforming the compulsory purchase process and compensation rules to improve land assembly, speed up site delivery and deliver housing, infrastructure, amenity, and transport benefits in the public interest.

The government has expressed concern there is a significant amount of suitable land available for housing which is currently lying vacant or underutilised and not coming forward for development and therefore, via reform, expects that local authorities will make greater use of compulsory purchase powers.

In December 2024, the government published a consultation (closed 13 February 2025) which looked (non-exhaustively) to address:

a. the possibility of increasing the use CPO powers

b. changes to the powers to limit, in appropriate circumstances, compensation payable of the prospects of planning permission ("hope value")

c. technical changes aimed at speeding up the process (including to the service of notices, decision making mechanics, and implementation of CPOs); and

d. the impact of such changes (including from an equality standpoint).

The Law Commission also held a consultation (closed 31 March) on compulsory purchase reforms, which addressed administrative, technical, and legislative matters.

If that wasn't enough, in addition, the government published a planning reform working paper entitled "Speeding Up Build Out" on 25 May. The working paper acknowledges that owners of sites which have been stalled for a long period (for example, sites allocated in local plans which do not come forward, or sites with multiple planning permissions that are never commenced) are unlikely to be able to show that their proposals could be delivered in a timely manner. Furthermore, currently, if a CPO is rejected on the basis that a landowner has alternative proposals for the land subject to the CPO, but the landowner does not progress their scheme, the authority must re-establish the case for use of a CPO and the CPO process must be re-commenced. This can cause delay and financial implications for authorities.

The government therefore intends to support the use of CPOs on these types of sites, via the introduction of secondary legislation, to allow the conditional confirmation of CPOs. The paper confirms that *"the conditional confirmation of CPOs could be used to ensure landowners progress their alternative proposals within certain timescales, which would be made clear when an individual CPO is conditionally confirmed. Where they fail to do so, CPO powers could then be switched on […] de-risk[ing] use of CPOs on stalled sites."*

More recently the government established the New Towns Taskforce to advise it on the delivery of a new generation of new towns. The Taskforce's recommendations are due this summer. In order to facilitate development on this scale, it is inevitable that CPO will play an integral role.

Considering all of this, it is clear that the government believes that there is an opportunity to use compulsory purchase more readily to speed up and unlock housing delivery in the UK.

What compulsory purchase powers are available to local authorities?

There are a number of different enabling powers, each of which specifies the acquiring authorities permitted to use that power and the purposes for which land can be acquired. This article will focus on the powers available to local authorities to compulsorily acquire land under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (TCPA).

S226 of the TCPA gives local authorities the power to acquire land compulsorily for development and other planning purposes, as defined in s246(1). S226 is expressed in wide terms and can therefore be used to assemble land for regeneration and other schemes where the range of activities or purposes proposed mean that no other single specific compulsory purchase power would be appropriate.

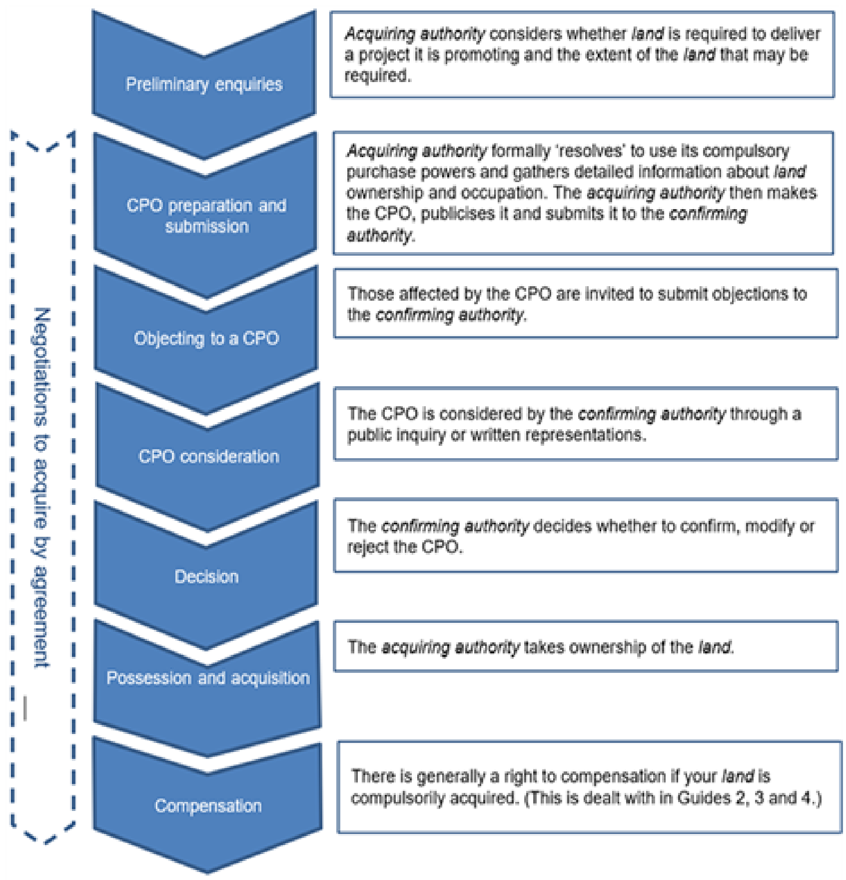
An Order made under section 226(1) should be expressed in terms of either being applied for under paragraph (a) or (b).

Section 226(1)(a) – An acquiring authority has the power to compulsorily acquire land within their area if they believe it will facilitate development, redevelopment, or improvement. The exercise of this power is restricted by section 226(1A), which mandates that the development must likely contribute to the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area under the local authority's jurisdiction.

A strategic framework is essential for any land assembly programme, especially when justifying compulsory acquisition under this section. The confirming authority will require a detailed statement of reasons, including a summary of the planning framework, to ensure the land's use and acquisition timing are justified, and will consider factors such as alignment with the wider development plan, contribution to the area's well-being, alternative means of achieving the proposal, and the financial viability of the scheme.

Section 226(1)(b) – An acquiring authority can compulsorily acquire land necessary for proper planning of an area, even if not required for development or improvement. This broad power under section 226(1)(b) is rarely used and is the subject of limited guidance from MHCLG – indeed, no CPOs have been made under this power since 2019.

While rarely used, there are examples of how 226(1)(b) powers can be exercised. In Mills v Secretary of State of the Environment Transport and Regions *[2000] J.P.L. 192*, a CPO was upheld for a neglected house that was severely dilapidated and detrimental to the local amenity of the area. The High Court noted that planning purposes include preventing neglect and maintaining neighbourhood character. Similarly, in Monen v Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and Regions [2002] EWHC 81, a CPO was confirmed for a property creating an eyesore and having a depressing effect upon the local area.



These cases highlight the power's role in addressing issues beyond development, focusing on public interest, amenity, and neighbourhood well-being.

Given the government's interest in encouraging local authorities to use their compulsory acquisition powers more frequently, providing clear guidance on the process under Section 226(1)(b) could lead to increased use of this power, especially considering the growing need for regeneration of site across the UK.

How does the compulsory purchase process work?

Compulsory purchase should be an option of last resort. MHCLG Guidance encourages acquiring authorities to seek to acquire land by agreement, but acknowledges that waiting for negotiations to breakdown before starting the compulsory acquisition procedures may result in prolonged delay – therefore it is recognised that the two activities may occur in parallel. The flowchart (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/compulsory-purchase-and-compensation-guide-1-procedure) outlines the key stages of the CPO process; it illustrates that engagement is a continuing obligation throughout.

Once a local authority is comfortable that it appropriately engaged to acquire the property by agreement, it can proceed to proceed with making a CPO. It is usual for the decision authorising the making of a CPO to considered by the council's Cabinet. The main work streams which will need to be progressed include:

a. undertaking a formal land referencing exercise which will inform the preparation of the Book of Reference and CPO plans, documents required to support the CPO process

b. preparing a Statement of Reasons which will set out the council's case for making the CPO, it should contain details of the purpose for seeking the land, planning position and any proposals for development, application of the public sector equality duty and Human Rights considerations, together with any special considerations affecting the Order land, history of engagement, other information of interest to persons affected by the CPO sourced and timing of funding for the proposed development

c. preparing a Property Cost Estimate, this will be undertaken by a specialist CPO surveyor, it will assess and identify likely compensation payable for the acquisition of each interest affect by the CPO

d. if the local authority is utilising CPO powers to support the delivery of a developer's proposal, a CPO indemnity agreement will likely be put in place whereby the developer is obliged to meet all costs associated with the CPO process, including compensation. It is not unusual for such documents to include appropriate mechanisms to secure commitments to delivering the proposed development project

e. early identification any impediments to development underlying the CPO and solutions to counter such impediments

f. preparing acquisition/ compensation/consultation strategies/material to be made available or communicated to those affected by the CPO; and

g. undertaking equalities assessments and ensure such assessments are regularly reviewed and updated during the CPO process.

Once an application for compulsory purchase has been made, notices must be published in local newspapers, setting out the detail of the order and allowing for objections. Even if there are only a limited number of objections to an order, the confirming authority will need to be satisfied that there is a compelling case in the public interest to justify the confirmation – accordingly, the acquiring authority should be prepared to present substantial evidence and detailed information that will enable the confirming authority to make an informed decision – by written representations or at a public inquiry.

Written representations and, even more so, public inquiries can be a lengthy and intense process which need to be appropriately resourced. Local authorities should continue positively to engage with affected third parties in parallel with the inquiry process to continue to secure the acquisition of interests by agreement and withdrawal of objections.

The compulsory acquisition process is likely to take a minimum of two years (although it is hoped that reform will accelerate this) – from the preparation of the order to the point at which a CPO is confirmed. This is notwithstanding the fact that confirmation of a CPO is subject to the usual legal challenge period and therefore proceedings could extend this timeline.

Potential risks and matters to consider

In addition to the obvious costs implications and timing issues associated with the promotion of a CPO at present, there are several crucial points that a local authority should consider when considering the use of compulsory purchase powers.

Viability/failure to prove deliverability
The justification of a CPO should include information regarding the deliverability of the proposed development and the sources of funding available for both acquiring the land (justifiably) and implementing the scheme for which the land is required (for a public benefit) and the timing of that funding.

It is not unusual for large development projects to have viability constraints, and planning applications will need to be supported by viability assessment where a viability case is being made. Care needs to be taken when preparing viability assessments where a CPO is likely to be required to deliver the scheme. An Inspector or Secretary of State determining whether to confirm the CPO will need to be satisfied that the scheme will be funded and be delivered in a reasonable time frame. A viability assessment which identifies a large deficit could undermine the CPO case.

One example of this is the London Borough of Barking's "Vicarage Field" CPO, which highlights the importance of up-to-date viability evidence. The Inspector refused the application on the basis that the authority and developer had failed to satisfy her that the scheme was viable, where the only reports obtained by the acquiring authority showed the scheme to be "substantially unviable" - therefore unlikely to proceed within a reasonable time.

This contrasts the recent confirmation of the London Borough of Southwark's "Elephant and Castle Town Centre" CPO, in which the Inspector noted that it *"has been independently confirmed that the scheme would be viable, this follows from an assessment undertaken by Avison Young […and] the Council has been able to demonstrate that there is funding available both to enable land assembly to be completed pursuant to the Order and to deliver the scheme."*

Viability assessments are therefore key to ensuring responsible use of compulsory purchase powers and facilitating successful scheme delivery.

Engagement
MHCLG Guidance confirms that the acquiring authority will need to be able to demonstrate that it has undertaken an appropriate level of engagement with the affected landowner and those with interests in the property, and to take steps to understand the impact that CPO could have on a person's interest in land, through direct engagement.

The Compulsory Purchase Association has highlighted how the CPO process can negatively affect people's mental health and wellbeing when ineffectively managed – causing "high levels of anxiety and stress" among claimants who expressed a lack of understanding of the process, unknown timetables, and compensation uncertainty – all pointing back to a lack of communication. As well as viability issues, Vicarage Field fell short in this regard as the Inspector noted that there had been a significant lack of engagement with objectors, with assertions being made regarding *"dismissive, condescending or threatening behaviour"*.

Acquiring authorities and confirming authorities should also be aware of the need to have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149 Equality Act 2010) before making the CPO and continuously thereafter. In practice, this means that communities and people likely to experience differential impacts of a CPO should be identified, there should be early and effective community engagement, and specific measure should be built into the scheme design to deal with any issues arising.

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham's "Shepherd's Bush Market" CPO was eventually overturned by the Court of Appeal, which agreed with the concerns of market traders and the planning inspector that the proposals to redevelop the market would not protect the diversity represented by the current traders and shopkeepers.

An encouraging example of positive engagement and recognition of these duties came in the London Borough of Southwark's "Peckham Rye Station" CPO, whereby the demolition of a shopping arcade to create a civic centre risked displacing traders - mainly Afro Caribbean hair and beauty salons. The council obtained a CPO following a commitment to procure a new "Peckham Palms" development for the traders nearby (with affordable rents). As such, the Inspector found that equalities issues had been addressed in a "thorough and fundamental way as part of the CPO and scheme design." Peckham Palms opened in 2019 and has been dubbed a great success among the community.

What's next?

The publication of several consultation papers on this topic, combined with the government's outspoken desire to reform the compulsory purchase process in order to accelerate housing delivery, means that local authorities will be expected to engage with the CPO process in a more meaningful manner.

This will no doubt lead to increased pressure on the resources of local authorities, many of which are stretched to capacity. However, it does present a real opportunity to deliver meaningful and lasting change in local areas, bringing forward development and contributing to local and national housebuilding targets.

In order to do so, it is essential that any local authority contemplating the use of CPO powers seeks the appropriate professional advice, including from chartered surveyors specialising in compulsory purchase, land assembly, and compensation. Practitioners in this area can help authorities unlock development opportunity and structure transactions, handle claim assessments, negotiate sale by agreement or indeed claims for compensation. This can help immensely with the engagement element of the CPO process, with an effective advisor understanding the duties that an acquiring authority must satisfy.

In all cases, the compulsory purchase process requires engagement with experienced practitioners who grapple with these increasingly complex areas on a regular basis. Obtaining advice early on in relation to strategy and an assessment of risks to the CPO process can save significant cost and time later on in the process.

CPO is only set to become more prevalent in the government's mission to deliver housing at scale and be utilised as a carrot and stick approach, to ensure that developers get on and delivery housing. When properly prepared for, CPO is an effective tool.

ESPRESSO BRIEFINGS

Espresso Briefings celebrate 10 years

Andrew Ewbank andrew.ewbank@avisonyoung.com

Avison Young's public sector CPD sessions, supported and partnered by ACES, reach a landmark decade and celebrate with an anniversary event in London.

Andrew is Senior Business Development Manager, Real Estate, Facilities and Infrastructure Management at Avison Young, winning and developing new contracts across the public and private sectors, specifically in property and facilities management. He set up the Espresso Briefings CPD series back in March 2015 and has been a staunch supporter of ACES throughout this time. He briefly left in March 2022 and spent 2 years in the rooftop solar industry, before returning to Avison Young in June 2024.

Avison Young has been hosting its Espresso Briefings for CPD series for 10 years. The free 1-hour training presentations prepared for public sector estates professionals launched in March 2015. Since then, we have delivered over 60 sessions in London, around the regions, and online.

In early April 2025, at our London Gresham Street office, we hosted the landmark 10-year session, titled 'Keeping the promise: has the Elizabeth Line delivered for places?'. This was a revisit of a presentation we hosted back in 2018 on the forecast real estate opportunities presented by Crossrail (the working title), and as the Elizabeth Line celebrates its third birthday in May, we explored if and how any or all these predictions have delivered.

The Espresso Briefings for CPD developed out of Avison Young's commitment to and leadership within surveying and planning services for the public sector, coupled with our relationship

We all form real connections to the places where we live, love, work and play. But those connections don't happen by accident. **We call that placemaking.**

At Avison Young, we believe that the places we create should shape the people who use them, just as much as the people who use them should shape those places. Join us in our mission to ignite public-private partnerships and build communities that deliver social, economic and environmental value for the people who call them home.

We are the people for place.

Contact us
08449 02 03 04
public.sector@avisonyoung.com

AVISON YOUNG

with ACES and annual sponsorship of the national conferences [Ed – see flyer for more information about ACES National Conference]. The briefings proved popular from the off (and were well timed with the office move into Gresham Street in Feb 2015). At each session, an Avison Young specialist hosts a topic and often invites a client to support a case study.

Their success is down to several factors: the sessions supplement practical surveyor learning, together with a well-located London office, a delicious free breakfast, and exclusive networking across London Borough property professionals. Ultimately, there's a committed team which organises and delivers an engaging programme. The success in London led to requests by ACES members for Espresso Briefings in the regions, and we have hosted them in our Bristol, Birmingham and Manchester offices.

The series has also provided a constant backdrop to many of our big company moments, including the day that GVA was officially acquired by Avison Young, with an immediate name change. Due to the start time of the event clashing with the embargo to the trade press, clients entered an event hosted by GVA and left as Avison Young (with a branded cupcake to take home).

One of the most significant Espresso Briefings was a session on Dilapidations, scheduled to be delivered on Friday 20th March 2020. We had a full house of 80 delegates booked to attend. However on the Wednesday evening, a mandate came from the top to pause all events due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Not to be beaten, the event was quickly remarketed to be presented online, via Zoom. Although networking and breakfast were sacrificed, this had the advantage of being able to go national all of a sudden, for the first time. The ACES regional memberships quickly facilitated an invitation, and the first Avison Young online seminar was broadcast, with further online events reaching an average of 250 people per event.

A big thank you to the many ACES members who have either presented, attended or helped to facilitate the success of this event series, and long may it continue [Ed – a prominent ACES member has called it chivvying or nagging – no names]. We look forward to welcoming you to our new London office at The Met Building, on Percy Street, W1. To ensure you are on our mailing list, please email Andrew.ewbank@avisonyoung.com.

Testimonials

"Over the past ten years, Espresso Briefings have been a great source of up-to-date information and networking opportunities. The range of speakers has been engaging, sharing knowledge from a range of perspectives. Now we are back having events in person it is a real benefit to catch up with old connections and make new ones."

Philippa Bancroft FRICS, Senior Manager, Greater London Authority

"As a regular attendee over the past ten years at the Espresso Briefings, the City of London Corporation has found the Briefings highly relevant, engaging, and informative, providing an excellent range of presentations in the local government property sector. The Briefings have consistently provided invaluable insight and information helping us navigate multiple challenges across the property sector in London local government."

Michael Gwyther-Jones B.Sc. (Hons), B.Arch. (Dist.), MPA, RIBA, ARB, Head of New Developments & Special Projects, City of London Corporation

"The Espressos have been a backbone of ACES engagement with Avison Young over the last ten years. Members get huge value from them, and we were sad when they went online during the pandemic. That said, the move from London to national through webinar format also had its benefits. Here is a toast to the next ten years."

Neil Webster, ACES

"The Espresso Briefings offer invaluable insights into relevant and current topics for the practising property professional, with the added benefit that they are free and provide excellent networking opportunities. ACES is proud to support these Briefings, and as a member of ACES, I have regularly attended and find they offer very good value."

Neil McManus BSc (Hons) MRICS, Development Contributions Manager, Suffolk County Council and past ACES President

Topics

Topics to date have included:

- Proactive site assembly for development (first ever session delivered by Virginia Blackman on 27 March 2015)
- Private rented sector funding and delivery
- Responsible property investment

2017 event

- Understanding the new RICS Code of Measurement Standard
- Section 106 viability
- Market outlook(s)
- Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards
- Future of town centres
- Rating revaluation (2017)
- Joint venture partnerships
- Managing property data
- Fire safety management
- Neighbourly matters - Party Wall and Rights of Light
- Real estate procurement
- Futureproofing commercial property
- Estate renewal
- The New London Plan and its effect on the outer London boroughs
- Social value
- Waste management
- Lease advisory legal update
- Rights of Light
- Industrial intensification
- 5G and the new Telecoms Code
- Dilapidations
- The post-Coronavirus development pipeline
- Service charges: what you need to know (post Covid-19)
- Town centres: short, medium and long term opportunities (post Covid-19)
- Cost containment (post Covid-19)
- Viability update: new RICS guidance
- Council finances
- Affordable workspace
- Navigating relationships and climate conscious leases
- Green industrial revolution
- COP 28: From global commitments to impacting you locally
- The Non-Domestic Rating Act 2023
- Strategies for success in public/private sector collaboration
- Road to net zero
- Estate regeneration

Sam is Chief Finance Officer of Re-Leased, a leading property management platform. He combines financial expertise with deep real estate knowledge, bringing over a decade of experience exploring how AI and connected systems are transforming asset and tenant management. As a thought leader in AI-driven property management, Sam offers valuable insights into the future of the industry from his unique perspective at the intersection of finance and technology.

AI AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Delivering at scale: The AI advantage in modern property management

Sam Caulton sam.caulton@re-leased.com

Sam makes a case that new recruits to property management will expect a degree of AI in routine property management tasks. He argues the advantages of AI at scale. While 'human' management of volumes might reduce quality, "AI reverses this by elevating the standard of management from reactive to proactive."

In an industry built on relationships, reputation, and results, the promise of artificial intelligence (AI) in property management is no longer hypothetical. It's a strategic imperative. As AI continues to reshape industries, commercial property leaders are now confronting a pivotal question: How can we harness AI to scale operations without compromising quality and the human touch?

For property firms managing complex portfolios, the answer lies in rethinking the role of the property manager, eliminating inefficiencies, and deploying AI to not replace people—but to elevate them.

The scaling challenge in property management

Real estate is fundamentally a people business. Yet, paradoxically, the very professionals hired to manage tenant relationships and drive asset performance are too often buried in administrative tasks.

1:500

With AI Agents, completing end-to-end workflows, such as tenant requests.

1:250+

With augmented AI such as data extraction, instant advice or task automation.

Take your property manager to tenancy ratio to new levels. Empower each manager to handle more tenancies, while delivering quality service.

Manual lease reviews, compliance checks, arrears chasing, and maintenance triage can consume hours each daytime that could be spent on strategic portfolio growth.

Larger firms face this at scale. Andrew Sutcliffe, Head of Property Management at Roger Hannah mentioned to us in a recent webinar, *"If AI or technology is going to do anything for us, it's to get us away from the desks so we can spend more time with key stakeholders, tenants, and investors."*

Statistics also tell this story. Over 90% of property companies are planning to introduce AI technology to support their staff across corporate real estate functions. In Europe alone, 85% of real estate companies expect AI to have a major impact over the next five years. The transformation is no longer a question of if, but when.

But scaling headcount isn't always commercially viable. The traditional model doesn't scale cleanly. In fact, it can erode margins. The opportunity, then, is to augment people with systems that extend their capabilities.

My aim is to use the rest of this article to outline a pathway for real estate businesses to achieve the benefits of AI at scale. This requires a shift in mindset and resourcing, but as I outline here, the benefits definitely outweigh the costs.

The property manager-to-tenant ratio: Redefined

With traditional methods, a single property manager might oversee 50 to 100 tenancies. This baseline creates a trade-off between service quality and capacity. But with AI augmentation, this equation shifts dramatically.
Re-Leased's own data reveals:

- 1:250+ ratio is achievable using AI-augmented workflows (e.g., automation of arrears, compliance, maintenance requests)
- 1:500 ratio becomes possible with AI agents that can autonomously resolve routine tenant issues with full property context.

This isn't theoretical. It's an operational reality in progressive firms today. And it unlocks enormous economic potential.

The transformation operates at three critical levels. At the micro level, AI unbundles individual tasks - tenant communication, maintenance processing, compliance checks - optimising each for speed and accuracy. At the context level, it integrates workflows, ensuring seamless coordination between departments. At the macro level, it creates an enterprise ecosystem that eliminates silos and multiplies productivity.

AI economics: Net operating income, occupancy, and margin impact

Deploying AI delivers value in several areas, but where we see it have the most impact from a commercial perspective is in three core metrics:

1. Net operating income (NOI)
AI enables proactive management and faster resolution, reducing vacancies and operational drag. More efficient rent collection and lease optimisation translates directly into stronger cash flow. Higher NOI strengthens financial performance, boosts property value, and improves profitability.

2. Economic occupancy
AI tools improve long-term rent roll performance by supporting better lease structuring, faster renewals, and tenant satisfaction. Stronger occupancy equals stronger revenue predictability. By securing stronger rents for longer durations and reducing downtime, AI drives more consistent revenue.

3. Operating margins
Rather than hiring more headcount to handle portfolio growth, AI agents expand capacity and reduce per-tenant servicing costs. This leads to margin expansion without sacrificing service.

The AI pathway: From manual to augmented to autonomous

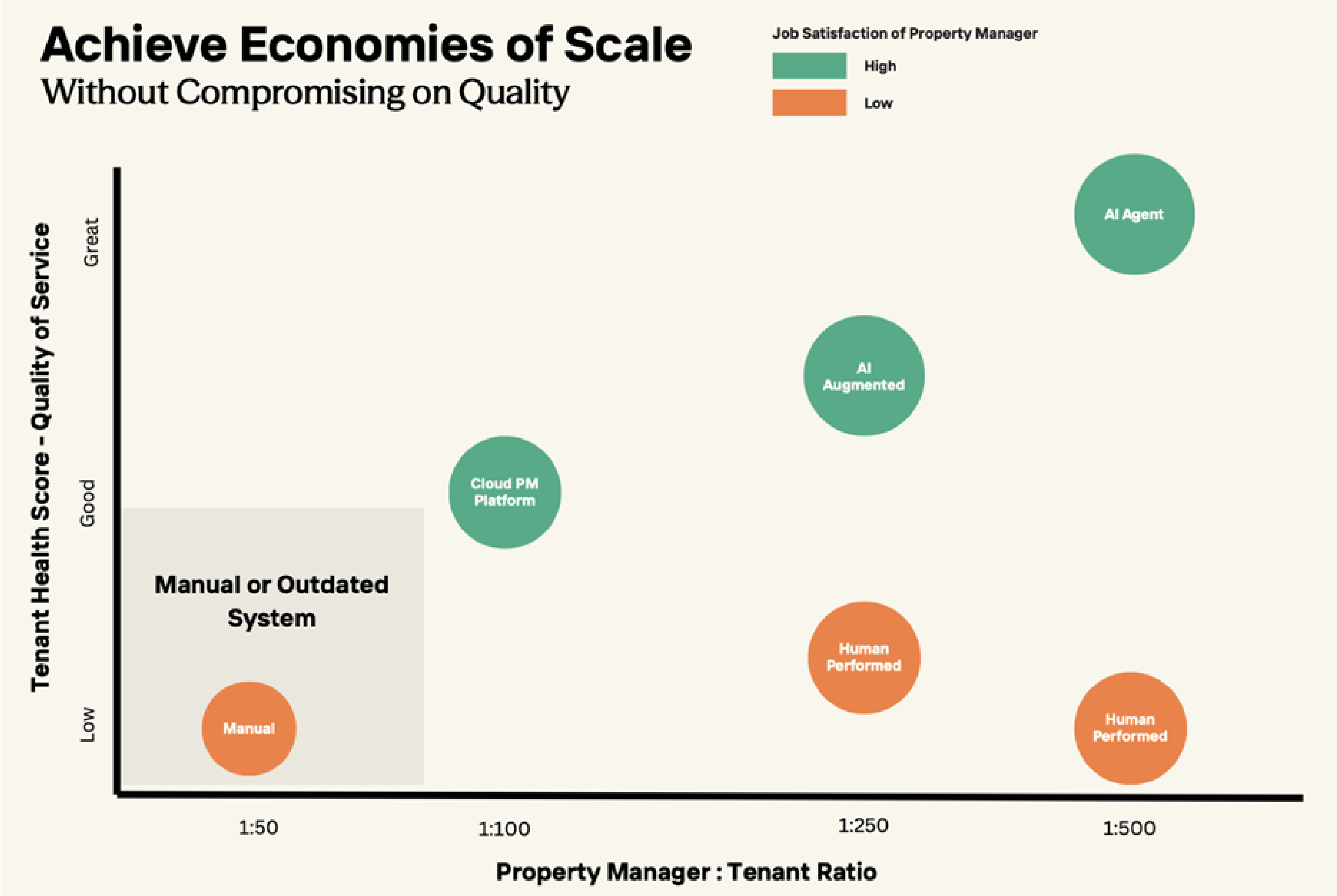
Let's break down the evolution of how work gets completed in property firms:

Manual - Legacy workflows are reliant on human effort. Repetitive, error-prone, and time-intensive. Property managers are trapped at desks, processing paperwork instead of building relationships.

AI-Augmented - AI assists with task execution, but humans remain decision-makers. Examples include:

- Compliance document extraction
- Arrears escalation triage
- Maintenance auto-classification
- Intelligent lease review and analysis.

Property managers gain superpowers—able to process information faster, make better decisions, and focus on high-value activities.



AI Agents - These intelligent systems go further by owning entire workflows:

- Handling tenant queries with 24/7 responsiveness
- Processing lease requests autonomously
- Generating draft communications and documents
- Managing maintenance workflows end-to-end.

From our initial research and development, with an AI agent removing administrative burdens, the 1:500 ratio becomes achievable within months. Managers can shift their focus to tenant and landlord relationships without the added workload.

Service quality at scale

High-volume tenant portfolios traditionally suffer from a decline in quality of service. But AI reverses this by elevating the standard of management from reactive to proactive. You're no longer just managing tenants - you're delivering a premium experience that's faster, smarter, and built for longevity.

Examples of impact include:

- 24/7 virtual agents that resolve 90% of tenant questions instantly
- Predictive maintenance that addresses issues before tenants notice
- Automated, personalised communications that keep tenants engaged
- Self-service portals that give tenants control over their experience.

Data shows that 90% of tenant questions are straightforward: "Where can I find my lease?" or "Who is my property manager?". AI can answer these instantly. When tenants do need human interaction, property managers have more time for meaningful engagement.

Prioritising tenant satisfaction fosters long-term relationships, reduces turnover, and ensures stable occupancy. Exceptional service and AI-driven personalisation enhance loyalty, driving higher rental yields and revenue stability.

The implementation playbook: For executives

Commercial leaders must approach AI not just as a tool, but as a transformation strategy. Here's a proven framework we've seen work across our customers:

1. Audit and prioritise - Identify friction points in your workflows. Look for volume-heavy, error-prone tasks. Review software and aim for platforms that can integrate, scale, and have AI functionality embedded into workflows

2. Quick wins first - Start with low-risk automations (e.g., invoice processing, data extraction). Automate high-volume, repetitive tasks to show immediate return on investment and build organisational confidence

3. Enable AI insights - Deploy tools that surface lease obligations, rent review opportunities, or compliance flags automatically. Implement solutions that enhance decision-making across portfolios

4. Deploy agents for repetitive workflows - Install tenant-facing AI agents for triage, maintenance, and FAQs. Integrate AI-driven virtual property managers to handle routine inquiries efficiently

5. Train and empower teams - Shift internal culture. Provide tools, training, and

ownership. Consider appointing an internal AI Champion - someone tasked with identifying emerging tools, testing them, and helping shape a long-term AI roadmap.

The biggest hurdle? Change management and knowing where to start. Culturally and organisationally, it's critical to stay open. Encourage curiosity across your teams. Let staff explore and test new tools.

For those ahead of the AI curve, we know that it is already shaping their business for the future.

The talent factor

AI isn't just a cost-efficiency play. It's also a talent magnet. Today's professionals expect modern tools and want to do meaningful work. People entering the workforce now have experienced AI and automation and will expect to use it in their day-to-day jobs.

By eliminating grunt work, AI helps:

- Retain top performers who can focus on strategic, high-value activities
- Attract tech-savvy talent seeking innovative work environments
- Accelerate skill development into asset management and advisory roles
- Create career progression opportunities as roles evolve from generalist to specialist.

Attracting and retaining talent ranks among the top three corporate goals for real estate companies over the next five years. Yet much of the talent in property teams remains mired in administrative tasks, transforming what should be value-driven roles into perceived cost centres.

Technology is already a talent issue. Digital transformation is both a recruitment and retention tool.

Building the AI-First culture

Successfully adopting AI requires more than technology deployment - it demands cultural transformation. Organisations must foster environments that embrace change and innovation:

Leadership advocacy: Leaders must champion technology adoption and communicate its strategic value. This advocacy proves critical for overcoming resistance and ensuring widespread adoption

Encourage exploration: Create safe spaces for staff to test new tools. If security is a concern, set up guardrails and provide budgets for experimentation

Measure and iterate: Use KPIs like processing time, employee satisfaction, and tenant retention to track progress and refine approaches continuously.

The speed of AI development means what was relevant last quarter might be outdated in six months. Adaptability will be key.

A new standard of enterprise property management

By leveraging AI across workflows, property companies can finally:

- Achieve proactive management at scale
- Deliver consistent, high-quality tenant experiences
- Unlock profitable growth without proportional cost increases
- Set new industry benchmarks for operational excellence.

This transformation isn't just about technology - it's about fundamentally reimagining what's possible in property management. AI enables end-to-end property service, elevating the standard from reactive maintenance and basic rent collection to premium, proactive tenant engagement.

At Re-Leased, we're leveling up the conversation, from simply increasing property manager-to-tenant ratios to delivering outstanding service at scale to each and every tenant—helping set a new standard of property management customer service.

The future of real estate is being built today - and it's powered by intelligent automation, AI-driven insights, and streamlined operations.

Final thought: Don't just add tech - multiply impact

Executive leaders must ask: are we enabling our people to do their best work? AI isn't about technology for technology's sake. It's about multiplying the impact of your team, your portfolio, and your customer experience.

The property manager of the future will play a transformed role, where expertise remains critical, but the manual and transactional tasks will fade away. This evolution will elevate the focus to proactive property and asset management, strategic decision-making, and fostering deeper relationships.

While technology will drive much of this shift, it's essential to prepare for change thoughtfully, ensuring we maintain the human connections that underpin successful property management. The way we work will undoubtedly be different, but by embracing innovation without alienating people, the industry can navigate this transition while preserving its core values.

When implemented thoughtfully, AI lets real estate organisations scale with confidence, outperform competitors, and set a new industry benchmark for service. There is no doubt that this shift is coming and adaptability will be key.

Rob is Lead Director for Building Surveying in London and the South at Watts Group. A Fellow of the RICS and Chartered Building Engineer, Rob has more than 20 years' experience advising occupiers, owners, funds and public sector bodies on all aspects of building consultancy. His expertise includes technical due diligence, dilapidations, development monitoring, refurbishment strategies, and estate management across a broad range of sectors including healthcare, commercial and education. Rob has particular experience supporting NHS Trusts in the complex real estate challenges of clinical environments, combining technical rigour with pragmatic solutions.

NHS REAL ESTATE CHALLENGES

How real estate consultants support health service managers to meet challenges

Rob Burke BSc (Hons) FRICS FCABE Rob.Burke@watts.co.uk

Demanding requirements for clinical environments and squeezed budgets across the NHS are two of the key challenges for real estate professionals working in the health sector, as Rob explains in this article.

The NHS is one of the largest landowners in England.

For consultants used to working on commercial projects, it is vital to understand that different priorities apply with the NHS and other health environments. For example, the NHS is seeking ways to manage land and buildings beyond delivering healthcare in ways that have a positive social, economic and environmental impact. Those challenges are manifest on NHS projects of all sizes, from major fitouts to minor maintenance programmes and even new builds.

For anything affecting existing real estate, there is a third hurdle that makes finding solutions in hospital environments particularly tricky – lack of space. That's something that these days doesn't generally affect modern office buildings since the move to agile working freed up acres of floorspace and opportunities to reconfigure, downsize or relocate.

Space efficiency

In 2016, a report by Lord Carter highlighted the potential to save more than £1bn by enhancing estate efficiency across the NHS in England. In the nine years to 2023, the cost of occupying and operating buildings across NHS secondary care fell 2.5% to just under £12bn, and the amount of floor area per patient attendance fell by 7%. Those falls came against a backdrop where the number of patients using the facilities rose by nearly 14 million.

Space in existing hospitals is frequently squeezed to capacity and sometimes beyond. Fluctuation in demand for space, for example during winter flu outbreaks, is another factor that is pretty alien to the commercial sector. Even so, an experienced project manager would be able to make useful recommendations for changes to a hospital layout that could improve efficiency and optimise space usage. This extends to data collection for the NHS and a current project with a NHS provider proposes to take on additional real estate and wants to ensure that its use of the space is optimised.

Watts has performed audits on NHS properties ranging from high level technical and strategic reviews, to the more prosaic such as the study of a single room to assess how it could be reused. Often, the first priority is for NHS managers to get a handle on what real estate they have. With accurate data, it is much easier to make the right decisions about how to manage that space going forward.

Part of that process will be assessing which spaces might be reused in specific ways. For example, some rooms might be repurposed for radiography while others would be unsuitable for conversion.

This kind of fact-finding exercise can also be invaluable in assessing pinch points where a shortage of space is creating bottlenecks and pointing out potential solutions.

Breadth of experience

Watts Group is currently managing Technical Due Diligence (TDD) on the possible acquisition of 100,000 sq ft of mixed-use accommodation for an NHS client in the Midlands.

The project is imperative as the client is considering a very long lease on the building. The Watts team's role includes a full TDD survey of the building and its services, as well as dilapidations advice, to estimate the likely costs for capital repairs and replacement up to the first break clause in the contract in 12 years.

Examples of other NHS projects in the pipeline include:

- Full TDD of a former private healthcare campus for the local NHS trust, including advice on the condition of the buildings and recommendations for repair and upkeep
- Specialist M&E services at a hospital campus involving survey of below-ground infrastructure and demolition of some buildings
- Full TDD for an NHS Trust looking to take a long leasehold of part of a multi-occupier office building.

Clinical challenges

The challenges with working in clinical environments compared with most other kinds of real estate are fairly obvious, but one of the effects of this is that it makes extending clinical spaces to new locations much harder than other use types. In particular, you can't easily repurpose other kinds of real estate for clinical purposes. At the most basic, if a hospital was to take one floor of an office block that was mostly occupied by commercial tenants, there would be problems with large numbers of patients visiting the shared reception area.

Converting such a space to health needs away from central resources in the main hospital would be difficult, if not impossible. In the main hospital, it's possible quickly to mobilise high performance flooring or clean air kit but away from the complex, that would not be so easy.

Challenges like these require lateral thinking. For example, could moving the accounts team to an office free up space in the main hospital that could more easily be repurposed as, say, a treatment room or operating theatre?

Compliance

Another major driver affecting real estate decisions in the NHS is compliance.

When it comes to compliance, different rules may apply to maintenance of different spaces across a hospital estate. For example, a tear in the floor covering of an office might not be a priority for repair, but the same damage in a clean environment would need urgent remediation.

Construction

When it comes to new builds, Steve Harper, National Director of Cost Management at Watts Group, has first-hand experience of multi-million-pound projects with household name hospitals. Budgets for these kinds of projects may be enormous but that doesn't allow for any profligacy. With any project, you have to be cost conscious. "As QS on these projects, you are always looking at ways to value engineer and get the maximum from the contractors. It's about making sure you understand the brief and that your tender documents are completely accurate" says Steve.

Compared with the private sector, Steve's experience is that there is more scrutiny over expenditure because these projects are financed by public money and charitable donations. Typically, QS professionals are reporting to senior management of the NHS Trust as well as the Trust's real estate team with very strict requirements, including explaining the details on changes to the construction programme and budgets and allocating responsibility for those.

A factor affecting many health estates is their location in built up areas. New works may attract noise complaints, despite being in the public interest. Road congestion is an issue, especially in emergencies. At St George's Hospital at Tooting, London, the contract included a helipad on the roof of one of the blocks for an emergency ambulance. When estates can't expand, sometimes the only way is up; similarly a project saw an additional storey built on top of an existing building at Royal Marsden, Chelsea, to increase space.

Other health sector projects in London involving Watts include:

- The £18m Oak Centre for Children and Young People at Royal Marsden, Sutton, opened by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. A complete new build, it features a roof terrace with a living wall
- The new main entrance for Guy's Hospital, which is used 11,000 times a day and features a projecting canopy and revolving doors to minimise

draughts. A key issue was delivering the work while maintaining the use of the entrance

- Conversion of an operating theatre to a state-of-the-art 'cyberknife' treatment centre at Royal Marsden Hospital. The £1.7m project took 43 weeks to deliver
- For Guys and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, a £0.9m refurbishment and renovation of the hospital's Shepherd Hall Restaurant, including the servery area, entrance corridor, back of house areas and services work in the basement
- A massive radiotherapy project in a basement at Royal Marsden, Sutton, with two-metre-thick concrete walls to protect the surrounding areas from harmful radiation and piling to support the structure.
- At London Hospital, Whitechapel, refurbishment of a row of terraced houses converted into an occupational therapy facility.

Maintenance

Watts Group's Vickie Oni has firsthand experience of managing NHS real estate at the coalface. Prior to joining Watts, she was embedded with two NHS estate maintenance teams, firstly at Watford General Hospital and then at Royal Free Hospital. Now a Project Manager at Watts, she says the multitude of maintenance issues and other challenges facing most hospitals would in almost all cases be best solved by rebuilding the entire facility. That is not entirely out of the question [Ed – see 2025 Spring Terrier for full article by Vickie].

Ambitious plans announced by the previous government for 40 new hospitals are progressing, though the definition of a new hospital has been somewhat watered down.

Nevertheless, in a "start from scratch" scenario, M&E teams such as those at Watts Group can build strategies and technologies into the design, for example to minimise the spread of pathogens, that would go beyond anything possible in a smaller-scale refit.

Even at that smaller-scale level, however, there is still much scope for improvement under the M&E banner, with improvements such as installing technology like advanced air filters and bacterial screens.

NHS budgets don't generally have the ability to allow for a wholesale rebuild of the entire health sector estate so in most existing hospitals, there is a sense among managers and maintenance teams of trying to make things work, even when it feels that the odds are stacked against you.

The process begins with the Quality Care Commission setting budgets for the hospital that need to be distributed and used within the year for which they are allocated. Senior members of the maintenance team will tour the hospital and prioritise what needs to be done, on both the patient side, such as a ward refit, and the staff side, such as upgraded staff facilities.

Once maintenance is scheduled, it is not always as simple as carrying it out. If we were looking at refurbishing a ward, for example, we would often come across blocks in the road, generally technical issues, and these would frequently have a knock-on effect. An asbestos survey could suggest specific work to address an issue, but a related review of air quality might also raise questions about how old the hospital's M&E systems are.

People power

In the NHS, there are a lot of people involved in decision making and a lot of approvals required, even down to the choice of paints that can be used.

It is usual for numerous people, both in-house NHS managers and private consultancies, to be involved with new builds, refits and estate maintenance, whereas in the private sector, whether residential or commercial buildings, there might be a single point of contact.

Last word

From basic estate maintenance to new builds, the expertise of project managers, M&E consultants and other real estate professionals can be invaluable. For their part, the consultants have to understand the NHS environment and adapt their thinking and methodologies to maximise value.

TARIFFS AND PROPERTY INVESTMENT

New inward investment in the UK property industry?

Kevin Joyce

In the context of unpredictable global tariff impositions, Kevin here considers the implications and opportunities for investment options for UK property.

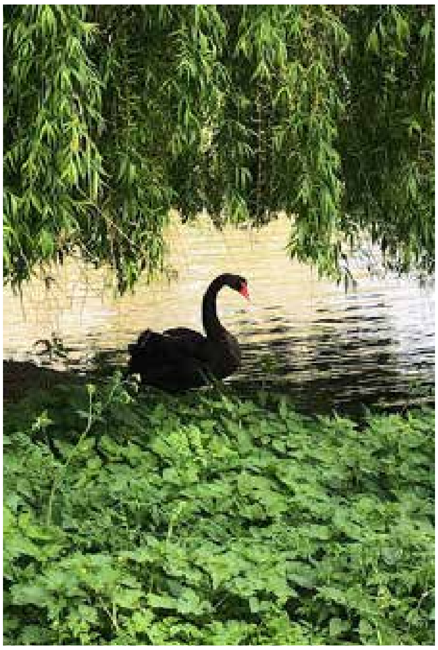
The impact of current tariff trade wars on economies around the globe is a black swan event where the uncertainty around economic outcomes and the extent of longer term ramifications for international trade are currently unclear.

As investors hate uncertainty, markets which can offer relatively stable and predictable economic environments will generally prove more attractive for investment than markets which are more intense and volatile. At this time, a widely reported shift in focus away from US stocks is reflecting a change of investment sentiment heavily impacted by political unpredictability (1), (2), with other investment markets expected to be beneficiaries of this change.

At a recent Association of Investment Companies webinar (2 June 2025), the view was expressed that the impact of tariff trade wars has been unexpectedly positive for Europe, with 'the imposition of tariffs on key trading partners and the threat of further escalation, prompting investors to reconsider the geographical concentration of their portfolios' (George Cooke, Montanaro Small Companies trust (3)).

There is some consensus that both the US and UK economies would be negatively impacted by retaliatory tariffs, which may open up new opportunities (4). If the UK in particular should be increasingly seen as offering the stable and predictable environment that investors seek, increased inward investment might be expected to benefit not only stocks and bond markets, but alternative asset classes such as real estate as well.

There could be project specific benefits, for example, if say a UK developer struggling to attract investment into a new scheme should find that the pool of prospective investors has become enlarged, increased competition perhaps also allowing them more scope to structure the terms of a development partnership in more financially advantageous ways.



Author note: The black swan is, I think, one of only two seen in London in recent time, taken in St James Park.


City of London from the South Bank

New strategic alliances might be formed, say between UK development and overseas investment partners. Because of the informal nature of the alliances though, with neither party(s) having clear control over the other, a high level of mutual trust and a full willingness to pool resources and share ideas and expertise, may be necessary for the alliances to work well (5).

More formal joint ventures could be entered into, these partnerships also being reliant on pooled resources, ideas and expertise, as well as other arrangements, including management teams with sufficient and appropriate skills and expertise being allocated to the ventures, and venture termination clauses being clear and unequivocal.

Strategic alliances and joint ventures may lead on to full mergers or acquisitions, but this can be fraught with its own, and not always easily predictable, risks. For example, cultural business differences might emerge that had not been so evident previously, integration of different management practices or information systems could prove more time consuming than the partners had anticipated, or management and staff in the acquired partner in particular might become disillusioned or demotivated.

The right choice of partner could be pivotal to a strategic alliance, joint venture, or merger or acquisition, realising mutually beneficial outcomes.

A strong symbiosis between the partners, reflected say in there being a clear shared vision between them, a good alignment of their core values and purposes, and effective strategic management systems being in place, might offer the partnership the best prospects of success. Better still perhaps, if both should share a willingness to engage in blue ocean thinking to explore new profitable ways to further develop their relationship and business.

Increased project specific and broader partnership creation activity could benefit not only the participants involved, but also the financial services sector, in the City of London, for example, engaged in supporting and facilitating the generation of the new activity.

References

1. 'US stock market loses $4 trillion in value as Trump ploughs ahead on tariffs' 10 March 2025 Reuters www.reuters.com
2. 'Investors retreat from US markets amid demand for global diversification' 8 April 2025 Banking Exchange www.bankingexchange.com
3. 'European investment trusts: opportunities amid trade war tension' 2 June 2025 Association of Investment Companies webinar www.theaic.co.uk
4. 'Why the UK may outperform other nations amid Trump's tariff war' 5 April 2025 Samra Ahmed Forbes Middle East
5. 'East-West Cross-Border Strategic Alliances' Kevin Joyce 2013 Spring Terrier p57-60.

David is an authorised High Court Enforcement Officer with approaching 40 years' experience in specialist evictions and enforcement. He is the director for corporate governance and compliance at The Sheriff's Office and regularly works with the National Eviction Team, both companies being part of High Court Enforcement Group.

He has a wealth of experience in dealing with high profile enforcement operations and has planned and led operations to remove demonstrators from complex locations, including St Paul's Cathedral (OCCUPY!), Admiralty Arch, Parliament Square, Bexhill-Hastings by-pass, nuclear power sites, and numerous fracking sites, including Balcombe.

AIRPORT ROGUE PARKING OPERATORS

Possession of land at Heathrow Airport

David Asker property@hcegroup.co.uk

David here describes a different sort of possession to any featured before in ACES' Terriers, but one not atypical for various airports – evicting rogue parking operators.

In March 2025, we were instructed by the owner of land within Heathrow Airport, next to the Eastern Perimeter Road. The owner had leased the land to a company who then sublet it to another company. The land was a muddy field being used for valet parking by passengers using the airport.

The landowner was concerned about the legitimacy of the sub-tenant operating the valet parking and wanted them removed.

The rising number of rogue parking operators at airports

These "rogue" valet parking operators are causing issues for car owners at many UK airports, as you can read in this BBC article about rogue parking at Gatwick Airport.

The BBC investigation found holidaymakers having long waits for their cars, some of which were damaged, at the hands of third-party car parking operators. A spokesperson for West Sussex Trading Standards said that in extreme cases cars were being "left in fields and on local highways".

The possession and the Torts Act 1977

Working under a writ of possession, the High Court Enforcement team went on site at Heathrow Airpot to take possession of the land to return it to the owner. As part

of this work, the cars that were parked there became the responsibility of our client, who became the involuntary bailee under the Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977.

This means that the landowner then had an obligation to take care of the goods (the vehicles parked there) and make reasonable attempts to trace the owner to return the goods.

To achieve this, we took a full inventory of the vehicles and liaised with personnel at Heathrow Airport to speak to the registered vehicle owners as they arrived back at the airport, to let them know what was happening with their cars.

Supporting members of the public

There were some owners who came over to the site, where we briefed them on what was happening and suggested they wait in the neighbouring hotel until we were able to release their car. We kept everyone regularly updated with our progress.

There was a farmer from Derbyshire who urgently needed to get home to milk his cows, and so we did our utmost to facilitate that. When we did reunite him with his vehicle, he was very complimentary about how we had worked to support him.

Challenges of working at the UK's largest airport

Airports are, as you would expect, critical national infrastructure sites and so you cannot block the perimeter roads, so the operation needs to be planned carefully. We worked closely with the Metropolitan Police.

While we were securing the land and had removed the operatives who had been present, the director of the company arrived with an entourage, who then blocked the perimeter road and tried to force their way back in.

We turned them away and explained that they would not be allowed back in and the vehicles there were now the responsibility of the landowner.

The possession was concluded efficiently and within the same day, so that everyone was reunited with their vehicle as quickly as possible and our client regained possession of the site.

30 years of the National Eviction Team

In 2025, we are celebrating 30 years in business. Over that time, we have worked on many national infrastructure protester evictions, including HS2, many bypass projects (including Newbury, Honiton and Dalkeith), and two separate projects at Manchester Airport.

We have also worked for energy companies – opencast mining, fracking and protecting the National Grid pipeline – as well as numerous traveller sites, both large and small, notably St. Agnes Place for Lambeth Council, 170 former Ministry of Defence houses in Sweets Way, Barnet, and Dale Farm for Basildon Council.

It's been a busy 30 years and a period where we have seen so much progress in the equipment and technology that is available to us. A very large number of our team members have been with us for over 20 years and have travelled this journey with us.

REFLECTIONS ON ACES

Reflections from the Head of Engagement

Neil Webster neil.webster@aces.org.uk

My role came about under the Presidency of Neil McManus. It was felt that we could do more to promote the organisation with the aim of increasing our influence and gaining wider membership. The latter was particularly about breadth i.e. more public sector bodies other than just local government. The role was originally called Business and Marketing Manager but evolved to Head of Engagement to align with modern business practice.

I have had the honour to serve under seven Presidents to date - Sara Cameron, Helen Stubbs, Christopher Rhodes, Simon Hughes, Peter Gregory, Graeme Haigh and the aforementioned Neil McManus. Each has their own personality and interests, so the Presidential 12 months is never the same which makes the job interesting.

The role is part time, averaging half a day a week; no week is ever the same which is why I enjoy it. There is a great camaraderie with Trevor Bishop, ACES Secretary, who keeps the ship sailing while I come up with wacky ideas to take us in to new areas. I have other outlets in my working life and I feel they complement each other. I did some work for Wokingham Council and got it to join ACES. Same goes for Surrey Heartlands Health and Care Partnership, and Liverpool Council. I enjoy making new connections for ACES.

New initiatives

So what have been some of those new initiatives and challenges over the last seven years? The Isle of Wight conference was fun, particularly the dinner at the Royal Yacht Squadron. I do recall the high point of my role was moving a sofa on to the stage in order to accommodate a fireside chat session.

Then in 2020 Simon Hughes led the idea to move from conference sponsorship to corporate membership. We had taken soundings from sponsors and members, that the support of the private sector would work better if it was stretched out over the year, rather just being the one-off conference focus. This seems to have worked as our four current corporate members – Avison Young (AY), Carter Jonas, Lambert Smith Hampton, Norse – are happy with the new arrangements.

Low points definitely include having to be part of our first "impersonal" conference in 2020 due to Covid. If it wasn't enough stress for Peter Gregory running a normal conference, just think of the added pressure of having to do the first ever online version. However, he pulled it off.

Having said that, Covid was a downer, but it did have the benefit of taking us online with a variety of events and many have continued. The Espresso events with Avison Young started as face to face London branch events 10 years ago. As soon as we were "locked down" they had to go online, and we now have two in person events and four online. AY likes them, as it reaches a wider audience and our retention rates are better than the norm i.e. of those that sign up a higher percentage attend.

In terms of longer term successes, the Future ACES (FACES) community seems to have evolved even better than I had expected. These are people working in the public sector who are on the path to an RICS qualification. We have over 230 people as part of the community and we have supported them in various ways – APC Away Days, Ask the Expert webinars and socials. It is so rewarding to be involved in doing something for the new blood coming through.

An example of why it gives me a kick is Jessie Leung, formley of South Gloucestershire Council and now Jones Laing Lasalle. She applied to be a MIPIM Ambassdor on our behlf and was selected to take part by the organisers. Ever since then she has been a brilliant ambassador for ACES. Her Linked-In posts often reference ACES and the public sector. She has paid us back in full and more for supporting her MIPIM trip.

The picture, taken at the London ACES AGM in 2024, epitomises where we have come as an organisation as they represent the themes of this article to date. From left to right, influence, corporate member, public partner and FACES. Lynda Rawsthorne is the Head of the Government Property Profession and a great ACES supporter. More about her later. Alexandra "Lil" Houghton is our contact at Carter Jonas, one of our four corporate partners. Lara Newman, CEO of LocatED, is another force of nature. She made a block booking for several of her staff to join ACES and is very supportive of the work we do. As we are of their Early Careers Network. Jessie I referred to earlier, very much the future of the profession. Four influential women together at an ACES event says it all.

Another highlight is working with Jackie Sadek. Jackie is one of ACES' Fellows and is one of a kind. She knows everyone and has the most compelling personality. You cannot fail to be enticed by her. She has opened up many doors which I have simply walked through for ACES. An example is the Public Sector Forum set up by the Estates Gazette. It was my pleasure to attend this with Sara Cameron in the lead up to UKREiiF where we launched the Working in Partnership report, in conjunction with seven local authority chief executives, Local Partnerships and the MJ.

Talking of the Public Sector Forum: there were none for years and now we are involved in two! The other is in conjunction with the RICS. Our partners are the Cabinet Office, VOA, LocatED and representatives from several government departments. Originally chaired by Lynda Rawsthorne, of the Cabinet Office, I have managed to get us, i.e. Dan Meek, in the chair for July. Sara Cameron and Alan Richards have both contributed to meetings to date.

My current latest opening for ACES is the Pathway to Property and one which I hope will end in MHCLG re-engaging with ACES after an absence of many years [Ed – far too long]. One of my contacts at Local Partnerships, whom I have worked with through my business Cyclo Consulting, introduced me to her colleague in the Local Government Association. For several years it has been running the Pathways to Planning programme. This is aimed at increasing the capacity of planning officers. This has been going several years with some success.

As the government has ramped up the housing target, MHCLG decided that there needed to be more development surveyors, building surveyors and construction project managers to support the housebuilding programme. I/we have been approached to be consulted on the nature of the resource required and how we can support the increase in capacity. As we have not had much to do with the LGA and MHCLG for several years, I am quietly confident this could be quite impactful and is kudos for ACES.

I am also pleased to have played my part in the development of the CIPFA/ ACES Diploma. While Malcolm Williams rightly takes the credit for taking it forward, it was a chance conversation I had with David Bentley of CIPFA which led to the opportunity to join forces. The rest is history.

Let's end on a modern twist for ACES. We haven't really formally pushed our social media presence until now. Trevor, Sara, Daniella Barrow and I have done our bit to Tweet (when that was the thing) and post on Linked-In. We have now upped the ante by appointing Sara Barton as our social media manager. Those in the social media world will have seen an increase in our activity in recent months and a consistency of branding. We have already had one membership enquiry directly from this initiative.

How do I wrap up? I cast my mind back to when I first came across ACES. I was working for GVA, as was then, and Keith Jones of DTZ, latterly Performent, suggested I get involved. I came to the conference at Morpeth (2007), presented to London Branch, and the regional conference at Aston University. Little did I know that several years later I would be leaving my mark on the organisation. Thank you, Keith - like Jackie Sadek - an ACES Fellow.

I thoroughly enjoy my role because I love what ACES stands for, the characters in its ranks and how it punches above its weight. I hope through this article I have managed to illustrate how it has evolved over time.

RURAL BRANCH HISTORY
ACES Rural Practice Branch - 10 years on: A celebration

Charles wrote the original history 11 years ago, when Rural Branch was celebrating its 10-year anniversary. We seem to be 'on a roll' with decade anniversaries.

A branch is born

Autumn 2003, the Presidential Conference in Portsmouth was winding down to its usual Friday lunchtime conclusion, with the majority of delegates and spouses getting ready to either disperse to the far quarters of the Kingdom, or join the Presidential party in an afternoon visit to an attraction of local interest.

A hardy trio remained, the rump of the Counties Branch, gathered, as had been the practice for a number of years, to hold its autumn meeting as an adjunct to the main event, ostensibly an endeavour to attract greater patronage! The main meeting venue had been set aside in the expectation of a bumper attendance, but the trio, the author of this article, together with Brian Reeve-Fowkes from Cornwall and Trevor Williams from Staffordshire, readily agreed the time was long overdue for a radical change: the idea of a specialist branch focusing on the principal common ground of interest - agriculture and the rural economy - was spawned.

Clearly, the old branch had become a victim of circumstance: changing priorities and local government restructuring meant its distinctiveness had become inexorably blurred, and its areas of interest swallowed up by the burgeoning local branches; the membership had voted with their feet in increasing numbers.

A constitution for a new specialist branch was drafted, its name designed to pass the Ronseal test. Informal interest was canvassed, and an enthusiastic response encouraged the founding fathers to continue. A formal proposal was submitted to national Council; after some debate this was approved on 22 January 2004 and the new infant branch had been born. The inaugural meeting took place on 26 April 2004 at Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, almost 10 years ago. Twenty-four rural surveyors, plus the then national president, Malcolm Dawes, attended.

Meetings

Since then the branch has gone from strength to strength. Attendees come from far and wide: Pembrokeshire to Norfolk; Cornwall to Northumberland. Meetings are held half yearly, usually varying locations, to spread the travelling, between Penkridge in Staffordshire; an academic institution in Cambridge, frequently Girton College; and Waterend Farm, Gloucestershire, appropriately a county council holding where the farm tenant, Hilary Mann, has diversified to provide a rural meeting venue and is famed for her shepherd's pies, always designed to boost attendance.

Meeting attendance is always buoyant, averaging at least 20 on each occasion, often boosted by visiting speakers and itinerant ACES Presidents keen to ensure a clean sweep of branch attendance during their year of office, often bemused by the professional technicalities under discussion to start with, but enthusiastically involved and immeasurably better informed by the time of their departure [Ed – I can vouch for that. I attended Rural Branch in 2006 where it was held at Girton College. Although Cambridge is just 'down the road' for me, it was the only branch meeting I had to travel to by car. There's an irony there].

Formal consultee role

In addition to branch meetings, national conferences and professional workshops have been held. The branch is also now a natural consultee of government, and enjoys a productive working relationship with DEFRA officials. Branch members attend meetings of the Tenancy Reform Industry Group, the principal forum for debate on matters relating to agricultural tenancies and their influence on the wider rural economy ; chair the County Farms Statistics Working Group with CIPFA ; contribute to the Welsh Government 's Way Forward Initiative reviewing the future direction of council farms in Wales; advise the LGA on rural issues; and contribute to the work of the Institutional Landowners Group of the Country Land and Business Association, and Fresh Start, a body established to encourage new entrants into the farming industry.

Speakers have made presentations at a number of august gatherings, most notably a seminar convened by HRH the Prince of Wales at Highgrove in autumn 2012. In 2008 the membership may recall the keynote speech to the AGM luncheon in the Guildhall, London being given by Sir Don Curry, then the government's special adviser on rural issues, when he launched a major discussion paper: "The Importance of the County Farms Service to the Rural Economy", a document the branch had been invited to contribute to.

Learned articles and Best Practice Guidance on a range of professional practice have been produced, most notably The Council Farms Rationale; Rural Asset Management; and Estate Asset Valuations. While the focus is primarily on the management of local authority farms, the branch has a broader rural remit and does on occasions discuss matters outside these confines.

So, 10 years on, the Rural Branch is now a well established feature of the ACES scene, and an increasingly respected voice in the farming industry across England and Wales - here's to the next ten years!

Postscript

Well, another 11 years have passed since this was first written, and ACES Rural Branch continues to flourish. Meetings now coalesce around two events, spring and autumn, at a central base, The Farmers' Fayre at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh. The format remains largely the same: erudite speakers from a wide range of rural related disciplines in the morning, followed by professional business after a buffet lunch. The "Around the Patch " session always invokes interest to hear what everyone gets up to, to compare notes on issues of common interest, and to pick the brains of others on knotty problems of prevailing concern.

Our profile continues to rise, and we remain established, influential players in our specialist field. Good Practice Guidance papers are regularly reviewed and updated and the ever evolving rural agenda remains a key focus of attention. Attendance remains buoyant, but the revolving door of professional appointments in member councils invariably brings fresh blood, new ideas, and vibrancy to our meetings.

Here's to the next 10 years, indeed beyond!

JOHN READ, NORTH EAST BRANCH

Virtual meeting 15 May

Following the results of the branch member questionnaire referred to in the last branch news update [Ed – see 2025 Spring Terrier], the branch held its first virtual meeting of the year on 15 May. The meeting was well attended and included Nicola Chiverton from SOLACE who joined us as a guest, to lead a discussion about recruitment and retention at a strategic level.

She first outlined the importance of technical skills to support public sector organisations and concentrated on some of the wider skills required to help progression within organisations. These included: development of general leadership skills; team management; political awareness; relationship management; and the management of multi-service areas.

Nicola advised that some of the current issues around recruitment and retention were skills shortages nationally; salary and benefits packages; staff leaving; weak internal pipelines for succession; nervousness about the security of public sector roles; and an ageing workforce.

She then went on to outline how individuals can aid their career progression to higher levels, advising that the following were essential: development of strategic thinking; knowledge of wider policy and governance structures; experience of long-term planning, budgeting and procurement; participation in public consultation; and developing cross sector and level communication and networking skills. It was suggested that many of these skills could be gained by proactive involvement in high impact initiatives and projects.

There was a long and healthy discussion afterwards and Nicola was thanked by all.

Other topics discussed included:

- Local Government Reorganisations and election results
- Surveying apprenticeship schemes
- Return to office working.

Newcastle from Ward Hadaway offices

Live meeting, 6 June

Our first branch meeting of the year was held on 6 June and hosted by Ward Hadaway at the company's Newcastle Quayside offices, with great views over the River Tyne taking in the Gateshead Millenium Bridge and The Sage. Over 40 delegates attended the meeting and it included an excellent programme of CPD with the following speakers:

- Expiring PFIs – Melanie Pears and Saji Bratch, Ward Hadaway
- The public and private sectors – working together – Richard Wilson, Lambert Smith Hampton
- Investment trends – Emily Wood, Lambers Smith Hampton
- An introduction to dilapidations – Michale Fletcher, Lambert Smith Hampton
- Planning update – Tom Proctor and Yvette Black, Jones Lang LaSalle
- High Street Rental Auctions – Dan Gordon, MHCLG and Sarah Wayman, Darlington Borough Council
- Incidents on public sector sites – James Donnelly, Ward Hadaway.

Marcus Perry, ACES Branch Liaison Officer, also addressed the meeting, promoting the ACES Trifold aimed at attracting new members, and reminded members of the dates of the Presidential Conference and AGM [Ed – see flyer in this issue, and full articles from Tom and Yvette, and Dan Gordon].

The next branch virtual meeting is on 10 July and the work is ongoing to confirm the details of the next live branch meeting on 7 November.

Sarah Wayman, ACES and Darlington Borough Council and Dan Gordon, MHCLG

MARCUS PERRY, SOUTH EAST BRANCH

The South East Branch held its first in-person and hybrid meeting for 2025 on 11 June in Horsham, West Sussex at the offices of our Branch Secretary. We were privileged to welcome ACES National President, Dan Meek, who was making his Presidential visit to our branch during his year in office.

The highlight of the meeting was the election by members of a new Branch Chair, Sarah Varley from Bracknell Forest. Sarah moved from Bath & North East Somerset to Bracknell a year ago where she was chair of ACES South West Branch, so she has more than a head start in ACES matters, which she will need to build up the South East Branch.

With seven members present in person at the meeting and only four on-line, the branch does need new members and member interest in our activities. We will be using our new tri-fold publicity pamphlet in a recruitment drive, which I will be helping Sarah and Branch Secretary Elizabeth Williams get underway shortly.

Next up for meetings: both in-person and on-line via Teams:

Wednesday 10 September 2025, OGM being hosted for ACES SE Branch by Lambert Smith Hampton, 55 Wells Street, London W1T 3PT. 2pm until 4 pm. Branch meeting with CPD content from LSH

Wednesday 19 November 2025, AGM in the Edinburgh Room at the RICS HQ, 12 Great George Street, Westminster, London SW1P 3AD.
2 pm until 3.30 pm. Annual meeting with CPD content

We look forward to SE Branch members – existing and new recruits and our FACES cohort - joining us in-person or on-line at both of the above.

VINCE GUZ, SCOTTISH RANCH

The ACES Scottish Branch held its second branch meeting of 2025 on 6 June, held at the historic Glasgow City Chambers. The hybrid meeting was attended by 21 members in person and on-line and welcomed ACES President Dan Meek as special guest. Dan took the opportunity to also present the ACES 2024 Award for Excellence for "Net Zero Champions" which was received by branch chair David Baird on behalf of West Lothian Council (WLC).

By happy coincidence, David is also Property Services Manager at WLC. The branch members received an update from Dan on the recent ACES Council meeting and went on to receive reports from the Valuation Working Group and the Asset Management & Performance Working Group, followed by a lively discussion forum session.

Following the meeting close, members participated in a CPD event with two presentations. Firstly, a Community Resource Hub (CRH) Business Case presented by Ijaz Bashir and Stuart Free of Scottish Fire and Rescue (SF&R). The idea of CRHs is that in more remote locations, public bodies such as SF&R might build a small unit for their own service delivery, but ensure it is capable of use by other services and community groups. In this instance SF&R was exploring the use of prefabricated units, which would be quicker to erect.

The second presentation was concerning the CoStar Market and Platform, presented by Jamie McPherson and Grant Lonsdale of Costar.

Those present at the City Chambers enjoyed a buffet lunch and the opportunity

to chat with Dan and the CPD session presenters.

The next Scottish Branch Meeting is on Friday 29 August 2025 at 10.00am.

KEVIN MOORE, HEART OF ENGLAND BRANCH

The Branch held its June meeting at Derby City Council's (DCC) offices, our first visit to the East Midlands since the pandemic, and it was good to meet prospective members from that authority, as well as others from that part of the region. The branch has a strong West Midlands bias at present, but we hope to have representation soon from authorities that haven't been part of ACES for a while.

We were pleased that ACES President, Dan Meek, was able to attend. Catherine Williams, Head of Regeneration and Economic Growth at DCC, provided an update on the various projects under way in the "City of Pioneers" and after lunch we visited the Grade 2 Listed Market Hall which was reopened in May, following a £35m refurbishment and seems to be very successful in building up a strong and interesting offer, including food courts and performance space. It's a striking building,

designed by the same architect behind St Pancras Railway Station. In all, 19 attended, including those on line for the CPD and business elements of the meeting.

The monthly online catch ups have continued and two of our members, Julia Nock of Wolverhampton and Peter Beer of the West Midlands Combined Authority, presented to the May meeting on their joint work under the Place Pilot, to plot the opportunities for the shared use of space and facilities in Wolverhampton across agencies in the public sector.

STEVE LITTLER, NORTH WEST BRANCH

Spring has been a remarkably busy period for the North West Branch, having organised our annual CPD event, closely followed by our OGM meeting, along with coordinating a workshop in collaboration with Salford University for public sector APC candidates.

CPD Day, 8 May

The Annual CPD event took place on 8 May 2025 at Haydock Park Racecourse in St. Helens. I was particularly proud to be hosting this event as St. Helens is my home town and has been my place of work for the past 25 years. It was also great to deliver another sell out event, with 120 delegates from across local authorities and public sector organisations in the North West. We were also pleased to welcome the ACES President, Dan Meek, to the event and we thank Dan for his attendance.

The event was kicked off as usual by Jeremy Steele, a Partner with Knights Solicitors who gave a presentation on a particularly interesting misrepresentation case, followed by a summary of the anticipated reforms to the Landlord & Tenant Act 1954 and security of tenure, which I am sure will prompt further discussions among members in due course.

Our next speaker was Rhian Smith, Director of Planning, at Avison Young, who presented a detailed update on the new and emerging planning policy changes, and some of the challenges and opportunities that this might bring for local authorities and public sector landowners. This hugely topical subject prompted a number of questions relating to developer contributions and devolution, among others.

As the event was taking place on the 80th anniversary of VE Day, we observed a minute's silence to show our respect and to celebrate the legacy of victory in Europe.

A break for lunch provided the opportunity for delegates to network and enjoy the usual sunshine on the racecourse terrace before reconvening for the afternoon session. Our first speakers of the afternoon were Katherine Sibley and Terry Griffin from Harrison Drury Solicitors, and John Rayner from Peridot Consulting, on the topic of the Procurement Act 2023. This was closely followed by a presentation from Nick Gerrard (Director of Growth and Prosperity at Blackpool Council) on the exciting and hugely transformational regeneration and investment development taking place across Blackpool.

Our final speakers for the 2025 CPD event was a presentation from Darryl Perry and Ash McCormick from Cushman and Wakefield on the North West property market update. This was another insightful discussion on how property markets are faring in the current economic climate and how they might change moving forward.

We thanked all our speakers for yet another fabulous event, all our ACES Members and guests for their support and attendance, and Haydock Park Racecourse for again hosting the event and providing the hospitality.

Meeting, 16 May

The CPD event was closely followed by the Branch OGM meeting on 16 May at Kilhey Court Hotel in Wigan.

18 Branch members and guests attended the meeting. Apologies were given from a number of our members, most notably our Branch Secretary, David Mee, who was recovering from recent eye surgery, and the branch acknowledged David's support in organising the recent CPD event and wished him a speedy recovery.

Other business included a branch financial update and a summary of items discussed at the recent ACES Council meeting from Keith Jewsbury.

The meeting also provided the opportunity to review the feedback from the CPD event which in general was an overriding success, and there was some discussion about how we might improve in some areas for next year, and some potential topics for consideration.

Dave Norbury provided the meeting with an overview of the successful event held on 7 April 2025, organised in conjunction with Salford University for APC candidates and their sponsors. The event was hosted by Kevin Aspin and Leslie Buchanan from the University and saw 30 attendees being provided with an invaluable insight into the APC interview process.

The branch meeting concluded with a presentation from Keith Jones and Amy Murphy from JLL on navigating the new planning landscape. Keith and Amy provided an insight into the changes under the National Planning Policy Framework and some of the proposed plans contained within the Planning and Infrastructure Bill 2025. Further detail was provided on the development on Grey Belt land and some recent case law on sites across the country. The final part of the presentation referenced a case study relating to Biodiversity Net Gain and some of the challenges in dealing with particular habitats. Thanks were given to Keith and Amy for their attendance and for their detailed presentation.

The next meeting of the branch is on Friday 11 July in St. Helens.

GERRY DEVINE, WELSH BRANCH

20 May 2025

For our first 'live' (or 'in-person') meeting of the year we were hosted by Newport Norse at the historic Lysaght Institute in the city. We were delighted to welcome ACES President, Dan Meek, and ACES Branch Liaison Officer, Marcus Perry.

Dan Meek, ACES President
Having dispensed with the opening formalities, Ben invited Dan to address the group and bring us up to date on ACES matters. He said that ACES is in good shape but is not resting on its laurels; there is a lot of work going on behind the scenes. He thanked his predecessor, Sara Cameron, saying she had a great year and through her efforts, ACES has a recently appointed social media guru in Sara Barton to develop ACES' profile on Linked-in and Instagram (see Linked-in posts from Ben and Sara). Neil Webster is growing FACES, working with graduates and the support of private sector firms.

Meanwhile Assistant Secretary, David Pethen, has settled well into his new role and is overseeing an assessment of the likely impact on ACES' membership of Local Government Reform in England. (Wales is already all unitary since 1997). The ACES Constitution review is ongoing and may be affected by LGR.

ACES is working with RICS to press for LA property professionals, especially those in the more senior positions, to be chartered and is urging RICS to be more active with LAs (LGR may present opportunities here). Senior Vice President, Alan Richards, is actively working with others to get a Junior Vice President in place as soon as possible, as well as organising the ACES Peak District Challenge Team for 5 September. ACES was a sponsor of the Three Peaks Challenge in Yorkshire last year with money raised for Cancer Research and British Heart Foundation.

The highlight of Dan's year will be ACES National Conference in the historic city of Bath in September with the Gala Dinner in the Pump Rooms on Wed. 24 and the Conference on Thursday 25 September [Ed – see conference flyer in this issue]. Entries for the ACES Awards for Excellence close in August.

Dan closed by saying that the focus this year is on RICS on multiple fronts – assisting graduates with APC through FACES, with experience provided by Norse, Avison Young, Carter Jonas and others, while the VOA is providing valuation experience, and pushing for LA property professionals to be chartered and Registered Valuers. There followed a short discussion on which authorities pay professional fees where professional qualifications are required for a post.

Marcus Perry advised that where members pay their own RICS fees, these are a tax-deductible expense. It was good to see the ACES trifold leaflets in use. He was pleased to see a good turnout of 20 for the meeting and attendees engaging fully in the discussions. He is also helping to organise the ACES Conference, mainly on the social side, and reminded members that partners are welcome to join in that.

John Tunnicliffe, Portfolio Manager of Transport for Wales
The Chairman invited one of the branch's newest members, John Tunnicliffe, to speak about his organisation (TfW) (as that is relatively new and also new to ACES) and his role within it. John explained that TfW is a company wholly owned by the Welsh Government, so a public sector organisation. There is also a linked company, TfW Fibre, working on core valley lines to sell fibre capacity and help end digital poverty in the valleys.

John explained the operating structure, within which Network Rail owns the lines and TfW the network; railway operators run the trains. Rail property is regulated by the Railways Acts and John has extensive estates responsibilities including not only leases, easements and wayleaves, but also has business managers who bring in income through advertising, sponsorship and naming rights. It is a wide role in which he can be wearing three hats!

John closed by revealing he has joined ACES to build links with LAs; property is a key component in providing transport links, both rail and bus.

Restructures and personnel matters

- Lyndon Watkins, MD of our hosts, Newport Norse - following an 18-month extension of the initial 10-year period, the Newport City Council and Norse contract will soon end. Newport Norse has grown from the initial 200 staff with £6m turnover, to 330 staff with a multi-million pound turnover, filling a skills gap and providing a wider range of services. Newport City Council is forming its own LAPCo (Local Authority Property Company) to which existing staff will be TUPE'd across and which will in future have more emphasis on social value and it may seek to grow across south east Wales. Newport is forming a new LAPCo rather than bringing property services fully in-house. This is because the council had found a LAPCo keeps politics a little at arm's length within which political interference is lessened but not totally eliminated
- Pembrokeshire is restructuring with more centralised property management. Pembrokeshire is still divesting itself of people, not property
- The Property Managers of Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen Councils are now sharing a chief executive (with a consultant employed to advise), two deputy chief executives (one in each authority) and a team of eight directors shared between the two authorities. Blaenau Gwent is to be re-aligned with Torfaen's structure. The new CE has different views from the previous CE at Blaenau Gwent (it was the first LA in Wales to move all office-based staff to fully agile/work from home contracts); he wants staff back in the office and has halted the sales of office buildings
- Tfw' is taking on two Network 75 students (integral with University of South Wales degree courses) and a graduate to strengthen the team there
- The VOA takes on several Network 75 or Apprenticeship students each year across the country as well as graduates who earn a substantial salary jump when they qualify, as well as having their professional fees paid by the VOA.

Operational property rationalisation and co-location

- Door-swipe card data for Caerphilly shows more people are now coming back into the office – up 25% on a year ago – supported by the chief executive, for more visible services in the offices
- The VOA now has a mandatory three days per week in the office
- TfW confirmed more staff are coming back in to their main office (Pontypridd)
- Rhondda Cynon Taff's mandatory one day per week has been increased to two now with different teams in on different days. The council has sold its main office to South Wales Police and its main offices are now at the Valleys Innovation centre at Abercynon
- Torfaen confirmed a gradual return too, although they may have a problem with insufficient desks!

Climate change - The Welsh Government (WG) is considering changes to the way in which carbon accounting is done: some changes to the system are being reconsidered, e.g., supply chain carbon is being counted in LA carbon emissions.

Community Asset Transfers (CATs) Review for Welsh Government – Professor Andrew Flynn of Cardiff University held a workshop in Cardiff. It was believed that LAs were not supportive enough of CATs. In response, LAs do not have sufficient resources to support CAT transferees but service level agreements are needed to ensure compliance, especially of statutory requirements.

There were no updates from Audit Wales, CLAW or RICS. WG and Ystadau Cymru (YC) - all the capital part of the Land Release Fund had gone and only some limited revenue funding remains.

Any other business
A question was raised as to whether members should be concerned about the recent news release of the VOA being merged into HMRC. The VOA's Principal Valuer for Wales said that it would be business as usual after the change. The VOA would become "Valuation Office", and would continue to carry out the agency work it does for LAs and other public sector organisations. More senior members would perhaps remember that the DV (or VO) was part of Inland Revenue before it was de-merged and became an agency and that process will now turn full circle back to the VO in 2027. All done for better organisational accountability.

CPD workshop
Designing and Implementing a Corporate Landlord Model – facilitated by Chris Brain. What can I say other than our Chairman's Linked-In post, "The highlight of the day (as always) was the engaging CPD workshop on the perennial hot topic of Corporate Landlord, expertly led by the ever-enigmatic Chris Brain. It was fascinating to compare different public sector approaches and hear about their progress to date."

JACQUELINE CUMISKEY, EASTERN BRANCH

Spring update

The branch has been actively holding monthly TEAMS catchup meetings, encouraging both members and guests to attend. These meetings often feature invited speakers or provide opportunities for colleagues to discuss local topics,tften we bring Forum subjects to the attention of the group.

17 April
Discussion topics included how does a district council see assets being retained locally; some thoughts on small charities and trusts taking over premises and their ability to manage them effectively; some big infrastructure projects making the news including Sizewell C developments; the National Grid upgrade with 184km pylons proposed from near Norwich in Norfolk to Tilbury in Essex, to carry electricity generated by wind farms in the North Sea, towards London.

15 May
Kerry Mullen from EDF Hynamics presented to the branch on the development of Hydrogen fuel, touching on topics such as the hydrogen bus project, energy transition and the opportunities for the public sector, including the requirement for local re-fuelling locations and the need for land to develop these.

12 June
We learnt about the work being done to create Affordable Later living Hubs. The demand for this tenure is very high; the call for investment in social care is at the forefront of government policy and across all parties. The number of people aged 65 yrs and over has increased from 9.2m in 2011 to over 11m in 2021 and the proportion of people aged 65 and over rose from 16.4% to 18.6% . Regen Partner, Stephen Parker, provided an insight into the opportunities to create hubs and access funding. This will feature in a forthcoming Terrier journal and a handy presentation is available.

30 June, in-person meeting

Thirty people attended on 20 June, for Ipswich Borough Council hosted in-person branch event at the newly built Layard House within the New Way Ipswich Development site. Dan Meeks, ACES

President Dan meek with speakers Dr Steven Norris of LSH and Emma Tubb of Birketts LLP

president, was able to join us, and he gave an update on his tenure so far, details of forthcoming ACES National events, and his plans.

Dr Steven Norris provided a keynote presentation about the findings from this year's REVO study focusing on Shaping Tomorrow's Places. The biggest challenges are identified as 'Business rates and online shopping".

We heard from Birketts LLP Senior Associate Emma Tubb with an update on the New Corporate Fraud Offence which takes effect from 1 September 2025. It creates a stronger responsibility for preventing fraud within an organisation.

Zach Tebbutt, Head of Construction for Ipserv, provided a presentation and timelapse video showing how this site has been developed and has delivered brand new offices, storage for Wastesaver, large warehouse and a vertical mixing unit. Originally a brownfield site owned by Manganese Bronze, there were issues not limited to contamination to deal with. This was topped off with a tour of the site and a networking buffet lunch.

Branch speakers often agree subsequently to write articles for the ACES Terrier, ensuring that the knowledge shared during these sessions is accessible to a wider audience.

There is a full diary for the next quarter and the next in-person event to be hosted by Watford Town Council in the Autumn is being planned.

CHRIS RHODES, LONDON BRANCH

London branch has met once since the April Council meeting, on 23 May at RICS HQ, Great George Street. A total of 21 members and guests attended.

The meeting opened with a presentation by Louai Kaakani of Locality on community assets. Louai outlined that associations with a freehold or long lease of their premises have been shown to be more likely to survive. The "Save Our Spaces" campaign has worked against a sell-off of community properties. Locality runs a national programme of grant funding and so far, has supported 409 community ownership projects, distributing £135m in capital and revenue grants.

Examples were discussed including Waltham Forest, where a scheme combined long leasehold community premises and private development with its own funding There was discussion of how cost mitigation by local authorities could facilitate long leaseholds for community associations.

An update was provided on branch liaison and general ACES matters. These included the new social media manager, confirmation of the conference dates in Bath, and of the national AGM in Cardiff. It was noted that the President would be chairing the RICS Public Sector Forum in July.

Other initiatives raised were a campaign to raise the profile of the property profession with chief executives and a potential scheme to broker outplacements for APC candidates. Forthcoming CPD opportunities were shared.

Members discussed matters of interest in their areas, including a children's home purchase scheme; asset review to identify potential sales; asset management software; property improvement for EPC ratings; site requirements by the Civil Service; school premises initiatives reflecting current demand; voluntary sector asset strategy including specific regeneration schemes.

Meeting dates for the remainder of the year will be in the months of July, September and December.

A cold dip after a run with Flo

David was Head of Asset Management at CIPFA for over 20 years but has recently 'semi-retired' and moved to live in the Scottish Highlands north of Inverness. If you are interested in his photography website and 'Grumpy' travel guides, they can be seen at https://davidjbentleyphotography.com/ You may even be tempted to stay at his Bed and Breakfast which can be viewed at cuillichmill.co.uk; if it's any comfort, he assures me that he is not responsible for cooking the breakfasts.

BENTLEY MEMOIRS

David Bentley bentleybunch@icloud.com

If you fancy a bit of light relief, you'll enjoy part one of David's holiday tales. He's promised a follow up (if I behave myself!)

A B&B break

It's late June and we're fully immersed in our 4th season of running the Bed and Breakfast. We're still top of the charts on AirBnB and Booking.com and getting a lot of repeat bookings. So, I suppose we must be doing something right. The reviews (which this industry lives or dies on) are coming in thick and fast and so far, the 5 stars are holding up. I even got called "Sweet, helpful and friendly" in the most recent, making it increasingly difficult to maintain my grumpy reputation [Ed – now that I cannot believe!]. Clearly, I've got to work harder.

The advantage of running a B&B from April to the end of October is that you get a lot of time off from November to March. The disadvantage is there isn't a massive amount open up in the Highlands between November and March, added to the fact that the weather during that period can be somewhat 'interesting'. Don't get me wrong - a sunny crisp snowy winter's day can be absolutely breath-taking but sometimes even I, who can't sit in the heat by a pool for more than a minute, might be prepared to look at sunny escapes for a rest.

A memorable flight

With one of our sons working in Australia, we took the opportunity to go and descend on him for a couple of months, a cheap holiday in one sense, but we still needed to get there. Our flight via Singapore was not without its moments. Everything was going swimmingly (probably not the best metaphor) through check-in, security and boarding at Singapore airport. Then sitting on the plane, 20 minutes before departure, all the lights and power goes off. Even the "emergency lighting that will guide you to your nearest exits" referred to repeatedly as part of the safety briefing were conspicuous by their unilluminated absence.

We sat there in silence, the cabin crew speeding up and down the aisles with torches trying to look as if they knew what was going on, without looking at all that they knew what was going on.

A few braver passengers asked the question which garnered a standard response "There will be an announcement in a minute". Twenty "announcementless" minutes later the power came back on and there was finally a broadcast from the captain. "It's a faulty part, but nothing too important", only the on-board motor that starts the engines. But don't worry "they're going to get a machine that can do it from the tarmac". At that point the power promptly went back off again with everyone completely informed, satisfied, and reassured.

Another 20 minutes with a full plane and no power. By this stage it wasn't the darkness we were concerned about, more the air conditioning. It was like being a baked bean in a full can that was being boiled on the hob - but without the tomato sauce. The air crew started giving out water, spilling a large percentage in the dark. And then as if by magic the power came back on again. "This is the Captain speaking; you might be getting a little toasty" (no kidding mister) "They're just fetching some air from the terminal".

It's probably the way my mind works, but I immediately had this picture of airport staff running up and down the terminal building waving their arms around trying to catch as much air as possible to bring back to the plane. Maybe you herd air? Maybe you catch it in great big nets, super-sized bin bags, or just take a very big breath, keep your mouth closed and sprint back to the plane where you can let it out again. Whichever method they chose it must have worked, as the air arrived and not a minute too soon. A bit like one of those disaster movies where the people that are suffocating are freed just on the verge of passing out, only slightly less dramatic.

"This is the Captain speaking" we knew his voice by now; he could save a bit of time in case the power went off again by not introducing himself. "We can't now turn the lights off for the flight, so we're going to give out free night masks."

Anything else? Has the plane got a sufficient number of wings? If the engines cut out again, will we need to pedal fast to start them? Are there snakes on the plane and Samuel L Jackson's going to jump out from one of the lockers?

Gradually the temperature cooled, the crew stopped tearing around, the passengers calmed, the engines started, we taxied down the runway, taking off just over an hour late. All in all, in the scheme of things not too bad. Most of the passengers were British and clearly tried to maintain a stiff, if not a little sweaty, upper lip in a time of 'mild peril' as they say in film rating parlance.

Last year was meant to be the 'one and only' Australia trip. Our son had a three-year contract, and he was adamant he was coming back to Europe when it finished. We took the opportunity for a down under experience while we had the chance. But Cupid's arrow (or possibly more appropriately Cupid's boomerang) can change everything in a heartbeat. Now he's an expert at cooking sausage sizzlers on the barbie and is actively applying for Australian citizenship.

Some national comparisons

So, this year was the sequel; admittedly we've got unfinished business in New Zealand, and we'd like to see the Barrier Reef, but many of the fundamental questions (great unknowns this time last year), were no longer a mystery. For example, Vegemite is not a patch on Marmite. OK, if you were marooned on a desert island with only a pot of Vegemite and a couple of slices of toast for company, you would probably condescend to spread a little, but not before you'd scanned the horizon for several minutes in the hope of an opportune Marmite tanker sailing past.

Secondly restaurants do not offer Brown Sauce. A bit of a deal breaker this one. I can't see me living long term in a country that offers you barbeque sauce as a poor substitute. It's not a surprise that our son asked us to pack some HP Fruity in the Red Cross Survival Pack we're carrying over for him, along with Vimto (probably wouldn't be my first choice) and Percy Pig Sweets. The boy clearly knows how to live.

I didn't bother watching re-runs of Skippy this time either. A year ago, I was up into the midnight hours watching the old series over and over as part of my extensive research into talking and understanding Kangaroo. I can only presume that animals in the various regions speak with different dialects as I hadn't got a clue what they were saying last time, and I'm not sure the kids who were stuck down the mine ever got out in the end (you probably have to be of a certain age to get that one!).

In its favour, Australia does have Yorkshire Tea, which was a mega bonus, enabling me significantly to cut down on last year's luggage and even pack a change of clothes.

I suppose there were still a few mysteries I hadn't yet got answers for. As an example, I didn't see haggis last time and more importantly Irn-Bru. The main focus of my excitement, however, this time round, was New Zealand. We went there on a lightning tour previously, trying to pack as much in as possible and missing most. This time we had two weeks to slow down and concentrate on the most southerly part of South Island, which we never got to last year.

New Zealand

After the tourist hotspots of Te Anau (pronounced Tee Are Na) and Milford Sound (pronounced Milford Sound) we moved on to the quiet but splendid Southern Scenic Route which skirts the coast of 'Southland'. Expansive, windy, deserted, sandy beaches reminded us of summer in the highlands, even though we were on the other side of the world. Gemstone beach was a particular favourite where if you're lucky, you can pick up a variety of semi-precious stones. Garnet, Jasper, Quartz, Nephrite, Diorite, Argillite and Gneiss, I assumed were the current most popular baby names in the UK, but Leila reliably informed me they were the varieties of gems she'd found during her beach combing. People are permitted to take stones from the beach 'within reason', which I think someone in our party interpreted as 'if it will fit in the luggage allowance'.

Bluff is the southernmost town in mainland New Zealand and one of the earliest towns established by European settlers. Also famous for spawning games such as Blind Man's and Call My. This is probably because they had a lot of time indoors playing games while sheltering from the excessively strong winds, which we experienced in the time we were there. As many people know, it was also the birthplace of both Frank Muir and Robert Robinson. (Again, you probably have to be of a certain age or google to understand the way my mind works).

Situated at 46° south, Bluff is regularly buffeted by the 'Roaring Forties', which would be a skiffle group, but are in fact the strong westerly winds that occur in the Southern Hemisphere between the latitudes of 40° and 50° south. The sign at 'Stirling Point' indicates a mere 4,810km from the South Pole and 18,958km from London so it feels a long, long way from home.

Stewart Island (or Rakiura) is located 16 nautical miles south of the South Island, across the Foveaux Strait. The island is very hilly, densely forested and home to various native flightless birds, including Kiwis and


David giving an asset management lecture to interested students!

penguins who thrive because there are few introduced predators. You are even asked to check your luggage and clothing for rats before travelling to the island to reduce the risk of invasive species, and after dutifully divesting ourselves of all secreted rodents (it's amazing how many you collect in your pockets if you haven't checked for a while) we made our way to the ferry terminal.

The wind by that time had got worse. The passengers disembarking from the early boat coming away from Stewart Island looked a pale shade of green and while a few were smiling, most just looked thankful to be on solid ground. The captain wasn't any more reassuring during the safety briefing, cheerily informing us that it was 'going to be a bumpy one' and 'make sure you have one of those natty little white bags handy at all times'. A fellow passenger said she'd heard putting an ear plug in your non-dominant ear is meant to help. Unfortunately, I didn't have an ear plug, nor do I know which of my ears is dominant as I can't remember them having a fight. In the end, I made do with putting my finger in my left ear to see if that would work.

The safety briefing continued, explaining how it was easy to tie the lifebelt round your waist with the crew member demonstrating, failing miserably, and having to get help to sort his straps out. They didn't even mention the Great White Sharks that frequent these waters; after all, tying straps on his lifebelt didn't help Robert Shaw from getting munched up.

All in all, I can't say I felt very comfortable as we left the quay, but an hour and a small amount of ear wax later, we arrived safely at Stewart Island feeling like we'd been through a heavily soiled wash, spin and tumble dry. The finger in the ear method appeared to work, although Leila wisely took some sea sickness pills in advance. They did however, warn of a drowsiness side effect and I haven't had a chance to ask if it affected her as she's been asleep all afternoon.

The main purpose for coming to Stewart Island was to see Kiwis in the wild. There are about 70,000 Kiwis left in New Zealand with 18,000 estimated to live on Stewart Island. We'd booked a wildlife safari with Kiwi Hunt in advance and at 7.40pm arrived in good time for our 8.00pm departure at the town wharf. 8.00pm came and went and by 8.10 we suspected something might be awry. We eventually established (after several phone calls and some advice from locals in the pub), that the booking agent had given us the wrong time and we were half an hour late. (We've since had a very sincere apology and refund). Some more scrambled phone calls from the bar staff and they managed to get us on a locally led Kiwi walk which started at 10.15pm (and half the price of the one we had previously booked on).

We were taken to the local airfield where the Kiwis often hang out. I was trying to work out why that would be and assumed it's possibly because being flightless they have to catch a plane to go on holiday. The guide's version was that the large grass fringes to the runway were a good feeding ground, but I thought my reasoning was far more likely. The signs weren't good though, as the previous two nights had resulted in a single fleeting glimpse of a bird disappearing into the bushes. The Kiwi gods however smiled on us, and we saw 4 in total. Two chicks (as soon as they are hatched, they have to fend for themselves), one inquisitive male and one larger female. The male even came and pecked at my shoelaces, presumably to check if they were clean and tied up correctly. It's said that only a small percentage of New Zealanders have seen a kiwi in the wild so we were very fortunate, and we subsequently heard that the trip we had been booked in never saw any either!

To be continued……

Valuation Office Agency

DVS EXPERIENCED DELIVERY TO REGIONAL, LOCAL AND DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT.

Being part of the public sector means we understand the needs of our many public sector clients and the challenges they face. DVS has national coverage but prides itself on its local experience and knowledge.

OUR SERVICES

Red Book Valuations

Asset Valuations
- Housing Revenue Account
- General Fund
- Plant and Machinery

Viability Assessments for Planning
- Development Viability Studies
- Planning Appeals

Head of Local & Devolved Government
Ellen Atkin
Tel : 03000 501703
Email : ellen.atkin@voa.gov.uk

Disposals and Development Consultancy
- S123 Best Price Compliance
- Development Appraisals

Compulsory Purchase and Compensation
- CPO Estimates
- Acquisitions and Negotiations
- Part 1 Claims

Heritage Property
- Valuations for Grants and Enabling Purposes

Strategic Asset Management
- Acquisition and Disposal Advice
- One Public Estate
- Consultancy Advice

Building Surveying Services
- Insurance Valuations
- Condition Surveys
- Dilapidation Reports

Clients Include:
- over 300 Local Authorities
- Parish Councils
- Police, Fire and Rescue Authorities
- MHCLG
- Welsh Government
- Scottish Government

DVS
Property Services Division - Valuation Office Agency

Crown Commercial Service
Supplier

CIPFA performance in public services

Diploma in Public Sector Asset Management

As a result of a protracted period of austerity in our economy and particularly in the public sector, key knowledge, skills and experience have been lost in property and asset management teams across the UK.

With little in the way of practical and bespoke training directed at the public sector asset management professional, CIPFA Property and the Association of Chief Estates Surveyors (ACES) have designed a modular diploma that seeks to deliver the skills and knowledge in those key areas of public sector asset management identified as requiring the greatest support:

Module 1 Strategic Asset Management, Introduction and Organisation

Module 2 Development of Documentation and Asset Management Challenge

Module 3 Business Case Development and Option Appraisal

Module 4 Capital Projects and Maintenance

Module 5 Data and Performance

Module 6 Operational vs Non-Operational Property

Module 7 Asset Management Today

Who should attend

The diploma is an ideal qualification for a range of staff who may be involved in Property Asset Management within a public sector setting. These include but are not limited to:-

- Property Staff new to the public sector or new to Asset Management
- New starters with little or no previous training
- Staff in other areas who may be involved in strategic property activity i.e. finance professionals, key clients from services, etc.
- More experienced property staff who have specific knowledge gaps or would like a more comprehensive understanding of this area.

How will the diploma be taught?

Whilst the diploma can only be attained by completing all 7 modules and successfully passing the end of course examination, each module is discreet and can be taken independent of other modules to help fill specific knowledge gaps. The course is to be completed through online webinar training

How will the diploma be assessed?

Short confirmatory assessments will be completed at the end of each module to ensure students have understood the module content. At the end of module 7 a full written assessment will be completed covering all elements of the course.

What will be the cost of the diploma?

The cost of each module will be £420 for CIPFA Property Network Members and ACES members. For non-members each module will cost £525. Existing members taking all 7 modules get a £200 discount.

Network Members—£2,940+VAT for the full Diploma

Non Network Members—£3,675+VAT for the full Diploma

For a copy of the course syllabus please contact Keeley Forsyth , Senior Business Support Officer keeley.forsyth@cipfa.org