

What does the Conservative-Lib Dem Coalition mean?

A Public Sector Perspective

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The new Conservative-Lib Dem coalition will be making changes that will affect planning, development and regeneration in the public sector.

What are the key issues and how might they affect you? See our responses to the most FAQs about what's in store for town planning.

How soon will any changes to planning affect my organisation?

Changes to the planning system will not apply retrospectively. The new CLG Minister, Eric Pickles, could make an early statement of Government intentions possibly including plans to revoke regional strategies and the abolition of the regional tier; these would achieve both cost-cutting and a move towards more localised decisions. Regeneration seems to be on the front line for spending cuts which could be swift and brutal but a new Planning Bill would take longer (see right).

So how will revoking regional strategies affect the public sector?

That depends where in the public sector your interests lie. If you want the support of existing strategies, either for making decisions on development proposals or for putting together regeneration schemes for example, there will be a limited window for relying on them. Their abolition could be unhelpful for promoting major housing schemes as there will be limited policy context until the new plans are prepared - but don't forget that in the longer term, there will be financial incentives for councils, designed to make them want to encourage housebuilding.

There has been a huge focus on 'localism' - what will this mean for the public sector?

The general emphasis on local rather than centralised decision-making is common to both parties. You should therefore expect a significant shift towards a more engaged planning system and away from centrally imposed targets and the strong adherence to the evidence base per se. You may begin to see a change in the tactics and motivations of developers if, for example, they wish to receive an approval under the current regime. It is likely that there will be a greater emphasis on public consultation at the local level and so you may wish to review how you will resource that need going forward.

What else is on the cards?

We expect a new Local Plan system to be introduced that will resemble the one before Local Development Frameworks. Localism might mean the re-introduction of the idea of third party rights of appeal. The Infrastructure Planning Commission will probably lose its separate identity so that a ministerial decision would be required on any major infrastructure project. The Community Infrastructure Levy might be replaced by local tariffs. Councils might have to apply a new 'competition test' to retail developments and the 'needs test' looks likely to be re-introduced, too. In short we should expect yet more change to the planning system.

How will all these changes be introduced?

We expect a Planning Bill to be introduced to Parliament in the first year of the coalition being in power. The detail will be in Green/White Papers which will give us forewarning and the chance to comment. In the meantime it is not expected that the new ability to extend the lifetime of unimplemented permissions, or to make amendments to approved schemes, will be removed.

And then what?

If the move to localism and other changes do not deliver increased levels of housebuilding, as many commentators think will be the case, or if they hinder economic investment, the merry go round of changes to the planning system will probably continue.

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