

## DeVARGA COMMENTARY – JULY 2015

### Dave – Here is Something to Chew Over

Back in June 2013 I wrote an open letter to David Cameron in which I discussed the Planning laws. This newsletter is again written to him in open form and it goes on about my pet subject, Planning. Dave, I have an idea which you may find of interest but, firstly, congratulations on winning the General Election.

There are a number of things I don't like about the UK Planning system, but that which really irritates me is what I term as the 'degree of uncertainty', resulting in substantial meetings with local Planners. This leads to the inevitable delay in getting approval. Delay costs money. Result = empty plots of land which otherwise could have houses built on them and sooner.

I think the United Kingdom could take a leaf out of the Planning system adopted in Australia and New Zealand. They have a far more simplistic system, and it goes something like this –

Every property is zoned. At the heart of the Unitary Development Plan is a statement which says that if your property has a certain zoning designation you can, as of right, create a structure based on what is called a Floor Space Ratio (FSR). FSR is linked to the site area. Applying the FSR to the land area gives one an envelope of space in which a structure can be built. This is a permitted right. The system goes further and stipulates this envelope of space must reflect distance from the boundaries, etc. They also give a maximum habitable room rate for residential envelopes.

What it does is permit the market place to create a model on which Planning Consent will be granted as of right; that right having a direct relationship to the zoning of the property, thus grouping economic users. Where someone wants to step outside the permitted envelope, they can do so by way of negotiation with the Local Authority. That 'opt out provision', for want of a better description, is often referred to as a specified departure. That move, of course, creates a delay but let's be fair, it is self-inflicted.

Do not for a moment think such a system will result in a tidal wave of demolitions across the country. It won't. Permission is one thing. The economics of development is another. It is profit which drives the market. That is where it gets its 'teeth'. What I propose here is merely mastication.

UK Planning has come a long way in the last 10 years. Already we are seeing the implementation of extension to houses under the permitted development rights and, more recently, change of use from commercial to residential in town centres. However, I for one believe if the system described above was implemented (sure, initially it is going to be expensive) it would result in an acceleration of new residential stock coming to the market.

Now I can see people thinking that we could have a mishmash of design and this could cause a problem in conservation areas and places of historic interest. I agree. The Antipodean system can/does/should accommodate history. Preserving the past is good thing. But, you know what, by looking to the past we often find a pathway to the future. And I believe change is a good thing. I will be interested to see the results of an exercise which Kevin McLeod is undertaking in England whereby some 100 plots are being set aside for 100 people to build what could well be 100 different houses.

So, come on Dave, let's see if we can make it easier to build more houses. My sublime message has always been (and still is) "take front line Politics out of front line Planning". Politics can come in at the specified departure point.

### Matthew S Martin FRICS FCI Arb

**PS:** Back in Dec 2014 I introduced Kamraan Khan BSc (Hons) who joined us in August 2014. After some hard graft (not only from him but from me!) I am immensely proud to announce that Kamraan is now the holder of the letters MRICS and can call himself a Chartered Surveyor. Well-deserved Kamraan. I also introduce to you a new member of our team. Ann Whiteside BSc (Hons) Construction Management, has joined us recently. As far I am concerned she has 'earned her spurs'. Ann brings a unique set of skills to DeVarga. In addition to having outstanding keyboard skills (I am sure I have seen smoke rising from her keyboard) she is also a qualified Surveyor. This dual expertise will bring another dimension to our team. It will be good for all of us. In the time she has been with us, Ann has taught me a few things. Welcome Ann.