

## BCSC Monitoring Digest 17 - 23 March 2009

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### **Business Rates Written Ministerial Statement - 23 March 2009**

The Department for Communities and Local Government is due to give a written ministerial statement on Business Rates on 23 March.

#### **Business Rates Debate - 25 March 2009**

The House of Commons will hold a debate on 'The impact of Business Rates and how businesses can be helped through the Recession'.

### PLANNING

#### **Industry members call for immediate changes to planning system**

(Property Week, 20 March 2009)

Michael Crook, planning and sustainability partner at Cushman & Wakefield has criticised the government's intention consult further on streamlining the planning system rather than implementing immediate reforms. Mr Crook has warned that the 'unnecessary documents' required by local authorities during the planning application process could mean they lose out on developments in their area.

Earlier this month the government announced that the DCLG will consult further this summer on recommendations made in the Killian Pretty report in November 2008 to streamline the planning system. The consultation will seek views on issues such as a rationalisation of the documents that developers needed to submit a planning application, and will be followed by a further update towards the end of 2009/early 2010.

For the press article, see <http://www.propertyweek.com/story.asp?sectioncode=274&storycode=3136512>

#### **Prime Minister outlines counter-terrorism training for shopping centres**

(The Observer, 22 March 2009)

Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Home Secretary Jacqui Smith have spoken about the government's counter-terrorism strategy, ahead of the launch of new guidance on Tuesday 24 March.

In an article in The Observer, Gordon Brown referred to a new 60,000-strong civilian force, currently in training, which will be a key element in countering the terrorist threat to the UK. It will include trained security guards in shopping centres. The updated counter-terrorism strategy is set to adopt a dual approach in which the authorities take a hard line on those directly involved in terrorism, but avoid alienating young people.

Joint DCLG and Home Office guidance, which will provide a supplement to existing guidance on planning policy and counter-terrorism issues, was announced earlier this year. The existing guidance "Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention", was published on 5th April 2004, was designed to guide those involved in the planning and design of new development.

For the press article, see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/mar/22/gordon-brown-terrorism>

## **Communities and Local Government Committee publishes report on IPC appointment** (Communities and Local Government Committee, 23 March 2009)

Following a pre-appointment hearing with Sir Michael Pitt, the Government's preferred candidate for the post of Chair of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), the Communities and Local Government Committee has published a report on the appointment.

During the pre-appointment hearing, Sir Michael Pitt explained that his early experience, working for the Civil Service, private sector and local government, involved planning, designing and constructing transport infrastructure in this country and abroad and that he has always felt there are significant improvements that could be made for planning arrangements for major infrastructure. He said that the new Planning Act is a radical change from the existing arrangements, and the proposals are very much in the public interest, suggesting this is a chance to make real improvements in building better infrastructure for the country.

With regard to the conditions placed on planning approval, Sir Michael suggested that the commission has a big role to play in ensuring that the mitigating factors that minimise the environmental and other impacts on the locality of a new development are reduced as far as possible. He proposed that one of the areas where the Commission can add value is ensuring the conditions for approval are well thought through and challenging in their demands of the applicant. Sir Michael set out the three stages during the process where stakeholders are able to voice their opinions; when the Secretary of State draws up a national policy statement, at the pre-application stage and lastly, during the evaluation stage itself when the IPC is handling the application.

The report from the Committee endorses the appointment of Sir Michael to the post. The IPC is expected to launch initially in 2010 as an advice-giving body allowing developers to prepare applications.

For the report, download <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmcomloc/354/354.pdf>

## **BUSINESS**

### **MP calls for action on empty shops** (Parliamentary Activity, 16 March 2009)

Bob Russell, Liberal Democrat MP for Colchester, has tabled an Early Day Motion (EDM) noting the rise in the number of empty shops in town and neighbourhood centres and setting out a range of initiatives the Government should take to combat this. These include freezing April's business rates rise, reducing VAT for refurbishment on retail property from 15 to 5 per cent and ensuring that planning, financial and parking policies do not discriminate in favour of out-of-town centres. The EDM has so far been signed by 20 MPs, including Brian Binley MP who chaired the Conservative's Commission into Small Shops in the High Street.

In parliament last week Andrew Rosindell MP, Conservative MP for Romford, asked what action BERR is taking to assist owners of small retail outlets. Pat McFadden, Minister for Employment Relations and Postal Affairs, set out the range of government initiatives aimed at helping small businesses.

These include a package of support worth £1 billion in tax cuts and £2 billion in loan guarantees announced in the 2008 Pre-Budget Report and a set of measures introduced in January this year, including schemes to improve access to finance, help with cash flow and additional support for training. Mr McFadden also referred to the government advice forum Business Link, which has carried out 32,000 free "Health Checks" for businesses since October 2008, 13 per cent of which were in the wholesale and retail sector. However Mr McFadden emphasised that small retailers are in the same position as any other small business outfit.

For the Written Question and Answer, see <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090316/text/90316w0031.htm#0903164600009> and for the EDM, see <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=38207&SESSION=899>