

Tories flesh out 'open source' planning

■ "Bottom up" planning reforms to hand neighbours powers to halt development

BY DEIRDRE HIPWELL

An incoming Conservative government could radically overhaul the "wholly negative and adversarial" UK planning system with a localist approach it calls "open source planning".

Property Week understands that a Conservative "green paper" on planning, to be published next week, will call for a "radical reboot" and replacement of the planning regime.

"Open source" is a computer concept whereby software is made more freely available and subject to amendment by users.

The Tories argue: "Given the scale of the problems we face, piecemeal reform is simply not an adequate response.

"We believe this is just the approach our planning system also requires. Rather than have one planning structure determined centrally and then applied unvaryingly across the country, we want to create a planning system where there is a basic national framework of planning priorities and policies within which local people and

their accountable local governments can produce their own distinctive local policies."

The key planks of this "collaborative planning system" are:

- creating a simple and consolidated national planning and infrastructure framework
- abolition of regional spatial strategies and national and regional building targets
- abolition of Labour's Infrastructure Planning Commission
- the use of private or hybrid bills in parliament to promote infrastructure projects such as high-speed rail
- planning inquiries with binding timetables will determine other infrastructure projects such as power stations
- flexible use class orders, so that land and buildings can be used for any purpose allowed in local plans created through "bottom-up" democracy
- abolition of planning inspectors' powers to rewrite local plans
- allowing neighbourhoods to keep some developers' contributions to councils from planning consents

- a presumption in favour of sustainable development
- automatic planning consent for schemes that meet sustainable development criteria and achieve "significant majority" support from immediate neighbours
- objections from "more than a small minority of residential neighbours" can halt a development without having to resort to a High Court judicial review
- reintroduction of the "needs test" for retail development and supporting the Competition Commission's additional competition test.

The paper also reaffirms pledges to match fund for six years council tax receipts for authorities that increase housebuilding in their areas or increased business rates by attracting new companies.

The Tories claim their proposals are "rooted in civic engagement and collaborative" and give "communities the greatest possible opportunity to have their say and the greatest possible degree of local control".

- leader, p25
- Steven Norris, p37

Frogmore's City hotel leap

Frogmore has won planning consent for an 80-bedroom luxury boutique hotel at 3-4 South Place, near Liverpool Street station in the City of London.

In November the company struck an agreement with operator D&D London for a hotel on a 35-year lease.

The 72,000 sq ft hotel is designed by Allies & Morrison. Conran & Partners, which is owned by D&D London's main shareholder, Conran Holdings, will design the interior.

The hotel will have a brasserie and bars on the ground floor, and a seventh-floor rooftop restaurant and bar with an outdoor terrace. Site work is scheduled to start later this year, for a summer 2012 completion.

Gerald Eve is Frogmore's planning consultant; Gerard Nolan & Partners advises Frogmore.