

Planning Searches: Keeping Ahead of Local Neighbourhood Change

When carrying out due diligence ahead of a property transaction, helping your client to understand the upcoming changes to the area surrounding their future home can be a shrewd consideration, ensuring that their investment delivers upon expectations.

At first glance, a prospective home can deliver everything your client is looking for. Be that scope for a home office, green space for walks and views, a garden in which to enjoy socialising with friends, or room to grow the family.

However, it is important that a homebuyer understands what changes are occurring in the local area, and how this will impact the extent to which the investment meets their expectations for the enjoyment of the new home and the lifestyle they envisaged.

Changes to the Horizon

In choosing a future home, a purchaser may be seeking something which the local area currently has to offer. Due to the impacts of Covid-19, with us all spending more time at home and in the areas close to where we live, there has been a clear trend towards homebuyers seeking proximity to green open space. According to Savills, during 2020 the 'country house' market rose in value by an average of 5.5% and quickly became the strongest price performing sector of the housing market. Analysis of transactional data by FCI supports this trend, with a clear bias towards increased activity in more rural areas:

Shane Herridge, Product & Data Manager at FCI said;

"Our 2020 transactional data clearly shows that rural parts of the country have benefitted from a proportionally more significant increase in sales activity than the conurbations when comparing the three months prior and post lockdown. This pandemic-driven change in home-buyer priorities is likely to be followed by increased investment in these booming areas. The alteration and development of new homes to meet this demand clearly has the potential to permanently alter the landscape in rural areas which might have otherwise been expected to remain untouched."

A prospective homebuyer who has chosen to purchase a property in a countryside location, or with views over a nearby field may be dismayed to discover


that the field in question is subject to a planning application for development of a large new housing estate.

Loss of green space and amenity areas, increased road traffic, a greater demand on hospitals, local doctors' surgeries and school places - are all possible effects of nearby development. In fact, construction projects themselves can be a cause of significant stress, inconvenience and even impact property value or saleability because of associated noise, dust and heavy vehicle traffic, which on some developments can last years.

Identifying Opportunities

On the other hand, knowledge of past improvements or upcoming changes to nearby properties may represent an opportunity. Someone looking to purchase a property with an integral or connected garage for instance may be doing so with a view to having options to convert the space in the future. Additionally, if neighbours along the street have all extended their properties, it is a good indicator that the Local Authority are amenable to such development.

Many homebuyers looking to purchase a larger property without the expensive price tag - may be seeking a property in need of renovation. For those with renovation aspirations, knowledge of conversion and extension activity in the area is likely to be of real interest and benefit.

 **FCI's Premium Plus Planning and Planning reports do the hard work, and deliver Local Authority planning application data relating to both the subject property and its surroundings in a useable and visual format shown in full on a clear indexed map**

Case Study:

Paving Paradise

In Coventry, land which was formally designated as green belt, was subsequently granted planning permission for the construction of 2,400 homes, in a bid to help fulfil housing targets for Coventry City Council.

Land on the 350-acre Eastern Green site between Pickford Green and Allesley Green has been re-assigned and allocated to form one of three Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs), following an independent examination of the Council's 2011-2031 Local Plan by the Planning Inspectorate.

This decision is likely to have had both a financial and emotional impact on residents living close to the development who would inevitably see traffic levels soar, both due to the new housing and an increase in traffic accessing the nearby A45, particularly with the addition of a new junction into the development.

Residents will see their semi-rural outlook transformed by the vast housing estate stretching across to the east and the south. A stark contrast to the views of gently rolling valleys, a hotel and golf course and the variety of footpaths that criss-cross small waterways into the distance.

As ever, with any changes to the local neighbourhood, it is the unknown that causes concern for residents, in terms of whether there will be an impact on property values and their sense of place, along with the feeling that what was once rural may now become suburban.

“ Working with an innovative company such as FCI helps us focus on the hundreds of other aspects of conveyancing, knowing that the environmental due diligence is in hand. The ease at which FCI searches can be reviewed and understood really makes a difference; saves us time and cuts down significantly on client queries

Andrew Richardson MloD, Director, Baker Ashley Ltd

The Rate of Change

Despite the impacts of Covid-19, 2020 saw 410,700 planning applications submitted to district authorities in England of which 313,900 were approved, according to government statistics. This was down only 10% compared to previous years and included 5,000 major residential developments.

Changes related to Permitted Development Rights (PDR) which came into force in August last year have already provided a catalyst for regeneration, aiding the swift development of commercial properties within the same use class and reassignment to residential use. Add to this a relaxation of planning restrictions, announced in September as part of the government's reform proposals and the UK is set for a surge in development activity. This is already reflected in an analysis from the Purchasing Managers' Index, which reports that construction activity as of March 2021 is growing at the fastest rate since September 2014.

While many will support development for the benefit of the local economy, most will prefer that it's not at the expense of their local neighbourhood or community and it is vitally important that development takes place at the right pace and in the right locations.

With a surge in activity, we envisage a rise in issues relating to

visual encroachment and light in neighbourhoods, which could lead to lengthy or protracted planning disputes. With this in mind, more than ever it will be important for homebuyers, aided by the property and legal industry, to scrutinise planning data to identify if such changes pose a risk to them.

Intelligent Insight for Conveyancers

Planning information is of course already considered in conveyancing, detailed in responses to the CON29 enquiries of Local Authorities. However, the listed planning history relates only to the property in question. To appreciate the surrounding activity in full, an interested party can access the Local Planning Authority website, however many of these websites simply contain lists of planning applications, and so a quick appreciation of the proximity or location of applications in respect of a property is near-impossible.

FCI's Premium Plus Planning and Planning reports do the hard work, and deliver Local Authority planning application data relating to both the subject property and its surroundings in a useable and visual format shown in full on a clear indexed map, with further details of each planning entry itemised below for quick reference. Having access to this key information enables property professionals, including conveyancers and solicitors, and their clients, to swiftly appreciate the planning landscape and make an informed purchase decision.

Including information on developments and applications, extensions and small new builds, change of use, lawful development certificates and telecoms installations, the reports also highlight possible planning and development constraints and major developments which may have an impact on the homebuyer's quiet enjoyment, plans and the potential future value of their property.

Getting the Full Picture

The impact of nearby development is linked to the setting of the property in question. For relevance and improved usability, FCI planning searches use a dynamic search radius dependent upon the location of the property and whether it lies within a rural, suburban or densely populated urban area. This ensures that only those developments which are of relevance to the property are captured and allows a manageable representation of planning applications.

However, our innovative approach goes further than just utilising a dynamic search extent. In addition, FCI Planning searches proactively seek to identify and report on those applications which, due to the way many Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) record planning data, are commonly missed by other searches. This is particularly pertinent in the context of larger developments. We call this unique solution FCIcapture. FCIcapture seeks to identify and flag planning applications which, although recorded by the LPA as being outside of the search radius, on the ground have the potential to encroach within influencing distance of the property. These are then clearly highlighted in the report for further consideration and interrogation as necessary by the purchaser.

For more information on FCI Planning and Premium Plus Planning, speak to your reseller or visit www.futureclimateinfo.com/planning

“ The use of the planning data has helped immensely when dealing with purchase transactions, especially in an ever-growing property environment. The search provides clarity to my clients and enables them to make a more educated decision when purchasing a property, a service that was just not heard of until these new suppliers. Now my clients are fully armed with all the information possible

Sarah Joy, Conveyancing Executive and Supervisor, PCS Legal