

# General Election reaction from Browne Jacobson's government and infrastructure team

05 July 2024

## Browne Jacobson's government team has reacted to confirmation that Labour has won the General Election.

Lawyers have put forward their views on what they would like to see from the new Government in supporting the local government sector and to realise its ambitions in reforming the planning system to build new homes and infrastructure.

Peter Ware, Head of Government at UK and Ireland law firm Browne Jacobson, said: "The future role of local government, and how it's funded, will be a key issue for the new Government, which must get to grips quickly with the acute and wide-ranging challenges facing the sector.

"With a significant proportion of councils in financial distress and many facing Section 114 notices, new ideas on driving efficiencies and generating revenue will be required in the absence of increased funding.

"Fundamental reform is also desperately required to adult social care, which commands huge amounts of council budgets, after this has fallen by the wayside during successive previous governments.

"A continued commitment to devolution in the Labour manifesto will be welcomed as this provides certainty for the roadmap ahead. Cross-boundary collaboration between devolved and non-devolved areas on areas such as planning must be incentivised to support delivery of new homes.

"With Sir Keir Starmer's 'decade of renewal', he must identify how to revitalise public services by delivering new infrastructure, whether it's schools and hospitals for local areas or major road and rail schemes.

"Too many projects have been cancelled or delayed in recent years due to costs and while changes to infrastructure delivery governance and the introduction of a National Wealth Fund will prove beneficial, ultimately we still haven't identified an alternative way of financing public infrastructure since the public finance initiative (PFI) ended six years ago.

"It's clear that some form of public-private partnership will be required and the new Government must find a new model that hits the sweet spot between economic reality and political idealism during a time of challenging financial constraints."

## The impact on planning and environmental law

Ben Standing, Partner specialising in planning and environmental law at UK and Ireland law firm Browne Jacobson, said: "The level of success Labour has in achieving its vision to 'get Britain building again' will be fundamental to sparking sustained economic growth over the next five years and beyond – but it must overcome major obstacles to deliver this.

"It's commonly accepted that the planning system simply isn't delivering because of the delays and costs it incurs. There is wide agreement that an improved system would be agile, speedy and proactive to deliver the right development and infrastructure in the right places. However, this is not as easy to achieve as it sounds.

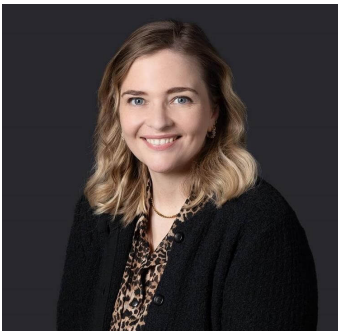
"While Labour's commitments to building 1.5 million homes, and delivering major transport projects 25% faster and 20% cheaper than current levels, represent the type of ambitious thinking the UK economy needs, it will have to find ways to get communities onside as well as navigate swathes of competing planning and environmental laws.

“This leaves the new Government with two choices – it can either loosen planning requirements so it’s quicker and cheaper, but may not have the necessary protections or achieve desired placemaking objectives, or it can invest more into the existing planning system to try make it work via increased resources.

“We’ve already seen radical planning reforms, such as those proposed by the Conservative government in 2020, watered down over time amid various opposition that illustrates the tension between a desire to speed things up and the lack of a clear path to achieving this.

“The priority should therefore be to streamline the process for updating local plans, giving the private sector certainty over strategic direction and reducing the potential for disputes, and then bolstering councils with sufficient planning officers to process applications and get building work underway quickly.”

## Key contact



**Henrietta Scott**

Head of Marketing

PRTeam@brownejacobson.com

+44 (0)330 045 2299

---

## Expertise

Environmental

Planning

Public law