

'Pretty review has delayed what requires immediate attention'



Jeff Field, director and planning group chairman, Jones Lang LaSalle

The government's response to the *Killian Pretty* review of the planning system has just been published. The government says that: "We need to lay the groundwork now, so that as economic growth recovers, the planning system facilitates rather than inhibits sustainable growth."

It suggests that the review and its recommendations seek to improve the application process from start to finish. The problem, however, is that the review seeks to tackle problems at the highest level through structural changes rather than by trying to deal with planning at its most basic approach.

By being so comprehensive, it has delayed what requires immediate attention and has diluted possible quick wins.

In this way, it has delayed any immediate improvements for the private sector at a time when the economy needs it most.

So, from a private-sector

perspective, what has the *Killian Pretty* review ever done for us?

- A promise to review how planning works so that it does not prevent development starts
- A consistent and simpler pre-application process
- Streamlined technical submissions
- Allowing minor material changes to be made after permissions have been granted
- Some use of qualitative targets rather than timescale measures
- Potentially alternative dispute resolution approaches.

Yet local authorities can already deal with these matters flexibly and quickly, if they so desire. So I wonder if the review was all about resourcing and management with little for those who, on the whole, pay for and use the system every day? The government says that it is to create a Stakeholder Sounding Board for reviewing new ideas. I hope this includes members of the private sector.

Planning heads across the country have been looking at ways of improving their systems locally.

Streamlining national policy frameworks will also have limited impact within the industry.

In time, the structural changes proposed in the review will have an effect and may, potentially, be ready for the next upturn, but they are doing little for those who want to get planning applications through now, who need ways to:

- Remove the burden of processing smaller applications
- Make it easier to deal with smaller schemes
- Increase the number of prior approval procedures.

Some of us remember the 1980s when there was a presumption in favour of development at a time when progress was needed. Economic viability had barely entered the planning debate as a planning consideration.

Today, we have the thorny question of affordable housing as well as other planning obligations.

If you thought planning was difficult before, then I suggest you think again.