
Future Proofing

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Future visions of super connected, energy efficient homes in greener locations are all becoming a reality with recent or proposed changes to legislation and regulation. These improvements represent great progress but keeping up to speed with change in a more heavily regulated landscape can create challenges, particularly for smaller or medium sized developers.

First to broadband. *"Developers will be legally required to install high-quality digital infrastructure from the outset, make it a priority as part of the build, and ensure broadband companies are on board before the first brick is laid,"* (Department of Media, Culture and Sport) and corresponding changes have been made to Building Regulations. The applies to all new residential dwellings, including conversions and self-built homes. The Government has worked with providers so that they contribute to the costs of installation.

This move to provide gigabits, not just megabits of information will deliver significantly faster and more reliable connections, for multi device use in individual homes. It will be achieved through FTTP (Fibre to the Premises) broadband infrastructure that runs directly to the home connector, without being hindered by the old telephone network. The current average broadband speed is 72 Mbits. Gigabit enabled infrastructure delivers well above what the average home requires, even with increased levels of homeworking, but it certainly shows the direction of future technological change.

Larger developers have already made public commitments to this delivery and many were ahead of legislation. Smaller developers would be advised to future proof and ensure that installation times for this now essential utility is factored in to development schedules to avoid costly delays on site.

Other changes include The Environment Bill, now in its final stages, which is mandating a 10% increase in net biodiversity for land seeking planning permission and requirements to maintain this for a minimum of thirty years. Further evolution in the planning system also encourages improved social inclusion, with schemes promising gains in this area more likely to be granted permission.

And innovative approaches to home design will be needed to comply with ambitious net zero carbon targets. Thermal building fabrics, environmental control systems, different heating systems and window installations will all be part of a mix of new elements in more sustainable approaches.

Developers will need to consider, for example, if they have the right expertise on board to succeed in planning and comply with new regulations; if they have secured sufficient land to meet new requirements; if their pricing model needs to change to maintain return on investment.

Practice does help absorb the changes, but less frequent exchanges with local authorities and inspectors does not diminish the need to understand the impact of change and act on it. Developers who consider this now will be future proofing the homes they build.

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