

Leave it to the mayors

Industry experts at Trade Direct Insurance agree that granting regional mayors more power over housebuilding projects could offer the perfect balance between growth and conservation. The new announcement could be the catalyst that the construction industry desperately needs writes Patricia Gardiner, sales and marketing director at Trade Direct Insurance

Despite frequent commitments to housebuilding targets, the government has not seen significant progress in the number of new houses being delivered. While there are many reasons for this, a long and convoluted planning approval process means that major growth driving projects, including houses and infrastructure, can be easily blocked by councils and local pressure groups. This can lead to long delays, significant cost overruns, and hesitancy on the part of developers to commit to hiring a workforce for a project whilst its future remains uncertain.

While the concerns of local people should absolutely be considered, the current process gives far too much power to so-called 'NIMBYs' to hold up major projects. Handing powers to overrule protest to regional mayors could, however, offer the perfect balance.

Regional mayors are answerable to their local electorate, and are more aware and sensitive to local issues and sentiment than national politicians are. They also balance this sensitivity with an awareness of the importance of major construction projects to deliver growth and prosperity to their region. This gives them a unique insight that helps them to balance growth with conservation.

For industry leaders, developers and construction firms, this decision will also provide greater reassurance. Companies will now be able to plan for projects with far greater certainty that they will not face endless delays and



Patricia Gardiner

objections to a project, which will in turn lead to increased willingness to hire new workers, including committing to take onboard apprentices.

Hiring apprentices and providing them with meaningful experience on the job requires employers to have a level of certainty around their future work pipeline. This then allows them to ensure they have mentors prepared, a clear programme of learning for the apprentice, and the correct employer's liability insurance in place.

"The ongoing skills shortage crisis will not be solved until employers in the construction sector can hire with increased confidence that their projects will not be blocked or delayed indefinitely. Providing further clarity will therefore offer increased opportunities for the sector as a whole to maintain employment for skilled workers, and provide work experience for young people looking to enter the workforce. □

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