



WELCOME...



With the farmers amongst you now well into harvest we hope progress has been good and the breakdown gremlins (also known as harvest students) have not been causing too many problems. I certainly hope you have a better relationship with your machinery than one client, who asked if I could kindly call back later as he was busy praying over his combine!

Whilst the frenetic pace of harvest and autumn work can mean other projects take a back seat until later in the year, the pressure to make progress with diversification projects is never far away. For those of you with barns that have the potential to let commercially it is worth considering what your target market is seeking in order that you are well placed to compete with the increasing number of redundant farm buildings on the market. Turn the page to find out what feedback we have been getting from tenants looking for accommodation to rent.

At the strategic level the rollercoaster ride that is the East of England Plan continues, with sweeping changes to the pattern of development in the M11 corridor being recommended by the independent Panel who have examined the draft Plan. Nationally, a new report from the Affordable Rural Housing Commission has criticised how Local Authorities have approached planning for rural settlements and whilst it is early days, offers some hope that the unremitting policy of restraint around villages and small towns may be approached on a more enlightened basis in the future.

Finally, please do have a look at our new-look website, which aims to provide more information about our services to current and new clients, as well as providing an easily accessible search facility for properties available for sale and let.

Clare Hutchinson



A New Perspective on Housing in Rural Areas?

Report from the Rural Housing Commission

The Affordable Rural Housing Commission have highlighted a significant shortfall in affordable housing provision in rural areas.

In launching the study the Chair, Elinor Goodman, commented that, "Villages and country towns must be allowed to evolve in the way that they did in the past – they can't just be preserved in aspic. Most can probably absorb some houses, as long as they are in scale and character and maintain the identity of individual communities."

The Report criticises how the concept of 'sustainability' has been applied to rural areas. It has been standard practice to judge villages as 'sustainable' or 'unsustainable' depending on what facilities they have, and housing is allocated accordingly, rather than considering how facilities might be improved with additional housing.

The report echoes the sentiments of many who live and work in the countryside, stating that, "The emphasis has been on conserving the landscape at the expense of the social and economic needs of the communities which live in them."

The Commission makes a number of recommendations, including exploring the controversial use of cross-subsidy, that is permitting market housing in order to deliver affordable housing, which has historically been resisted. The report also highlights how new draft national guidance on PPS3 should be

interpreted and outlines how the Affordable Rural Housing Commission has secured new provisions for housing in rural areas, including a provision that seeks to make sufficient land available either within or adjoining market towns and villages for affordable and market housing to sustain rural communities.

Although the Report concentrates on the delivery of affordable housing, it does highlight how previous policies, based on permitting only 100% affordable schemes, have failed and recommends a more intelligent approach to housing in rural areas than has been the case for the last few years. Whether this Report, and changes to PPS3, result in a change to the general policy of restraint remains to be seen. ■





Telecoms

In the last few months we have negotiated a number of telecom mast rent reviews but are meeting increasing resistance from operators. We have however achieved a number of market rent reviews upwards to over £5000 per annum.

During this time we have also experienced a number of operators walking away from new sites for planning reasons and operators changing policy or fund allocation.

There has been activity on upgrading and improving existing sites to accommodate Third Generation technology, which means Landlords should look carefully at what is permitted under existing leases. This has been bolstered by the public's uptake for third generation technology, with concerns about low uptake fading.

If you are approached, professional advice is paid for by the operator and it is highly recommended that you seek this as there are normally benefits to be had. ■



Sworders online

Sworders' new website is now online at www.sworders.ag. The site has been carefully designed to enable potential buyers and tenants to easily find property we have on the market as well as providing more information about our services to new and current clients. In addition, the articles section features all our recent newsletters and updates. ■

What Tenants Want

You may have seen our recent 'Commercial Feature' advertisements in the local press. In the latest edition we advertised over thirty farm buildings seeking commercial tenants. These adverts generate many enquiries but placing tenants is not always easy.



While the market for letting residential property continues to be strong, the commercial property market is more challenging – generally as a result of oversupply. So, in a competitive market, all Landlords need to ask themselves 'what do tenants want?'

Demand is stronger for good quality space, with planning consent for commercial purposes – tenants will want to know that they are not going to be enforced against. This also means good housekeeping, remembering to apply for Certificates of Lawful Use if you have had tenants in buildings for more than 10 years, particularly if your site has problems which means it would struggle to get a normal planning consent. If your tenant leaves you may well lose this valuable opportunity.

Good quality tenants generally want to present a professional image to their customers and therefore want premises that look like a commercial centre rather than a farm yard. A good standard of access is also vitally important.

Of course your location is not something you can change, however although buildings close to a trunk route or motorway junction may have an

advantage, a good location alone is no guarantee of finding a tenant.

With buildings regularly coming onto the market, tenants know that waiting often results in a building that ideally suits their needs – so there is no real pressure to compromise.

There are a number of steps to make letting your buildings more easy. Look into the possibility of obtaining planning consent for commercial purposes. Look at your site with a critical eye. Does it look like a commercial centre? Remember that is what you are competing with. Are there opportunities to improve access? This can open up a site that was previously almost impossible to let. Is there flexibility to split buildings to suit different size requirements? Make this potential known but perhaps hold off doing the work until you find the tenant. Keep your options and your mind open, and don't discount any types of tenant until you have met them in person and found out more about their business, (unless they want to fill your barn with fridges and disappear!).

If you are considering putting buildings to an alternative use we would be pleased to appraise the letting potential of your buildings and identify new possibilities open to you. ■

Half HIPS

On the 18th June 2006 the Government made a fundamental u-turn in Home Information Packs (Hips) to avoid the Big Bang approach, to introduce mandatory Home Information Packs. The Government announced that the Industry was not ready for such a change and could endanger the stability of the housing market.

The Government announced that Home Condition Reports (HCR) would no longer be mandatory. The

Government said that Hips would now include only local searches and Energy Performance Certificates as part of the phased roll-out of Hips and would cost in the region of £100 to prepare.

They plan to continue with further testing of the affect of Hips on the market and plan to introduce the take up of Hips on a market-led basis. Mandatory introduction of Home Condition Reports remains on the table; however this will be phased in when they consider the market is ready. ■

Grant Availability

Start up costs of a new business or the costs of expanding an existing enterprise may seem prohibitively expensive but there are many organisations who offer grants for a variety of projects.

Whilst the popular and well known Rural Enterprise Scheme has now closed, other DEFRA run schemes particularly aimed at agriculture are still running. For example, the Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG) is aimed particularly at agricultural products with a maximum grant available of £1.2 million. However, small and medium sized enterprises with innovative ideas will be given priority for the PMG.

The Agriculture Development Scheme, also run by DEFRA, provides grants to farmers and growers to improve their competitiveness through better

marketing. This grant can also be used for non-food products and has a maximum grant of £0.5 million.

The Home Grown Cereals Authority (HGCA) has many different funding options available from student bursaries, research and development grants to the Enterprise Award which offers up to £50,000 to develop an idea for a new or existing grain-based product and can include non-food uses.

Useful websites include: www.defra.gov.uk; www.hgca.com; www.growninherts.com. ■



Local Development Framework Preparation

All Local Authorities are now progressing with the preparation of their new-style Local Plans, known as Local Development Frameworks. As such, over the coming months there will be opportunities to make representations to change policies and promote sites for development.

Uttlesford are well advanced with the preparation of their LDF, with the options for the Core Strategy due for consultation later this year. Since any site specific proposals will have to accord with the Core Strategy, it is vitally important to influence the process at its early stages, and Swords will be making representations on behalf of a number of clients to ensure that landowner's interests are protected and enhanced. Other Local Authorities will also begin consultation shortly and we are closely monitoring timetables to maximise potential opportunities.

If you wish to discuss the promotion of particular sites or policies in any Local Authority please do not hesitate to contact us for a no-obligation view. ■

East of England Panel Report

The report of the Panel scrutinizing the East of England Plan has been published, which recommends sweeping changes to the 20 year strategy for development in the M11 corridor.

Whilst overall housing numbers for the region have increased, within the M11 corridor housing has been scaled down, with development reallocated to the new towns of Hemel Hempstead, Hatfield and Welwyn.

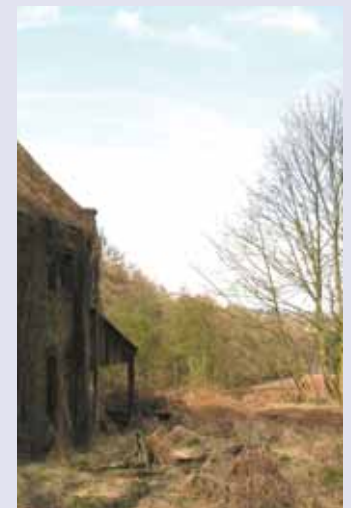
So at Harlow, the development of 10,000 houses to the North is recommended to be scrapped, with 13,500 houses recommended to be provided within and to the east, south and west of the town. The development of 6,000 houses at North Weald is also proposed to be removed from the Plan.

At Bishop's Stortford and Great Dunmow the references to specific sites for significant housing development is recommended to be removed, with the Local Authorities to decide where this development should be placed. For Bishop's Stortford

this is unlikely to alter the strategy of significant housing development to the North of the town inside the bypass. However, for Uttlesford there is considerably greater flexibility as to where they accommodate an additional 2,250 houses, with other towns in the district now open for consideration.

Overall, the Panel was critical of the concept of the M11 as a growth area, stating that it has little coherence in functional, geographical or economic terms and may even have been unhelpful in seeking sites to accommodate development in the Region. The Panel recommends instead designating towns where significant growth is proposed as key centres for development and change.

The Government will consider the Panel's recommendations and aim to publish a revised Plan in November of this year. There is no guarantee they will accept all of the recommendations in the Report. The revised Plan will be open for public consultation before a final Plan is issued in spring next year. ■



PROPERTY UPDATE

SOLD

Ovington Grange, a Grade II Listed former rectory has been sold for a figure significantly in excess of the Guide Price following a launch in the spring. The property was offered to the market after Sworders obtained planning consent for the conversion of the adjoining Coach House from an annexe and garages to a separate four bed dwelling.

In this case, achieving planning consent not only maximised value but widened options for the Vendor who has decided to retain the Coach House for her own occupation. ■



TO LET

Maynards Cottage is a spacious, 3 bedroom house in the quiet rural hamlet of Little Canfield, Essex. The Cottage is located on an organic farm and is set in its own large garden. The house benefits from being set well back from the road, and is served by a well maintained private driveway. The property has been redecorated inside and out and is available to let immediately. In addition, grazing land is also available to let with the house by separate negotiation for the equine enthusiast. ■



LAND FOR SALE

We have recently offered to the market 46.86 Hectares (115 acres) of arable/amenity land north of Little Hadham at Folly Farm. Following a successful marketing campaign the property will now be auctioned on Tuesday 5th September (unless sold privately beforehand).

The sale of The Folly represents a unique opportunity to acquire an attractive undulating block of farm land between the villages of Little Hadham and Upwick with excellent amenity potential. The Folly Wood stands in the centre of this block of land with a narrow linked belt of trees running east to the site of the former Folly Farmhouse which has commanding views over the surrounding countryside.

In addition to Folly Farm we have also launched 0.51 hectares (1.26 acres) of grazing land at Little Hallingbury with good access to the A1060 and 2.77 hectares (6.84 acres) of flat arable Grade 2 land to the north of Hatfield Heath. The land at Hatfield Heath is now under offer.

For further information on all of these properties, please contact our office on 01279 77 11 88 or visit our website www.sworders.ag ■



"The articles featured in this publication have been selected and prepared with a view to disseminating key information and are not intended to be comprehensive nor to provide advice. Before taking action advice should be sought for specific queries."